

The Sentencing of Jesus (*Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*) The 'Authentic' Jewish Protocols of the Trial of Jesus

GIDEON BOHAK



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of Asian and Middle
Eastern Studies

Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures

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(*GZAR-DINA DE-YESHU*)

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Gideon Bohak, *The Sentencing of Jesus (Gzar-dina de-Yeshu): The 'Authentic' Jewish Protocols of the Trial of Jesus*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2026.
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0497>

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<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0497#resources>

Semitic Languages and Cultures 45

ISSN (print): 2632-6906

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-737-7

ISSN (digital): 2632-6914

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-738-4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-739-1

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0497

Cover image: Genizah fragments, Cambridge University Library, Taylor-Schechter NS 329.820 and AS 74.141, preserving a part of the scene in which Pilatus interrogates Yeshu. Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

The fonts used in this volume are Charis, SBL Hebrew, SBL Greek, Estrangelo Edessa and Scheherazade New.

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PREFACE

Scholars who set out to clarify a particular issue can proceed along one of two different lines: either they can scrutinize the existing sources critically or they can compass land and sea to discover new sources.

Ernst Bammel, 'Christian Origins in Jewish Traditions'

These are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts *are* unpleasant.

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

Editing ancient texts is never an easy task.¹ On the one hand, there are the philological challenges, namely, having to master the requisite languages, to identify the relevant textual witnesses and to reconstruct a reliable text from lacunose, corrupt, or otherwise faulty manuscripts. On the other hand, there are the historical difficulties of identifying the time and place where the text was composed, contextualizing it within its historical setting, and studying the various stages of its transmission, in different languages and changing historical contexts. The texts themselves, however, usually are not so problematic. Some ancient texts are

¹ The research for the present study was funded by the European Union (European Research Council project, 'The Jewish Library in Late Antiquity', Advanced Grant #101097998). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

charming, amusing, morally uplifting, or all of these combined, while others are quite tedious and downright boring—but few ancient texts are positively offensive. Thus, when a scholar is editing an ancient text that offends our own sensibilities, he or she is faced with a different kind of challenge.

Toledot Yeshu is just such a text, or—more correctly—a group of texts. They tell some grotesque and humiliating stories about a man whom hundreds of millions of people see as God's son, who was crucified on humanity's behalf, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended to Heaven, and will return to earth at the end of history. Confronted with these texts, some scholars preferred to ignore them, wishing that they would somehow disappear from the historical record. Others related to them as 'parodies', which, it was implied, should be taken less seriously than texts which were written 'in earnest'. And indeed, some of the scenes in some of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts are so bizarre that it is easy to interpret them as written tongue-in-cheek and as a combination of inter-religious polemic and vulgar humour. Such texts are a priori less offensive to our modern sensibilities, not least because ancient and medieval Jewish (and non-Jewish) writers sometimes parodied their own religious texts and beliefs as well.

But what if the earliest of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts was not a parody? What if it was written in earnest, at a time when both 'pagans' and Jews were alarmed by the growing religious appeal and political power of the Christian communities, who had their own hateful views of 'pagans' and Jews? If this indeed is so, then the many nasty claims embedded in this text—that Jesus was the son of a Gentile father, and therefore a *mamzer*, that his miracles

were due to his mastery of magic, and that after he was crucified his dead body was dragged through the streets in order to prove to all his followers that he did not ascend to Heaven—were not intended to be funny, but to be polemically effective. And once a scholar—in this case, me—reaches that conclusion, the question immediately arises, how am I to edit such a text? After all, by reconstructing an ancient text that was mostly forgotten, or reshaped and partly defanged, long ago, I am making it available both to those Jew-baiters who were always convinced that the Jews had crucified Christ and remained his mortal enemies for the last two millennia and to those zealous Jews who see Christianity as the Jews' mortal enemy for the same two millennia, and therefore find special pleasure in nasty stories about Jesus.

In theory, the answer to this dilemma is quite simple; scholars of antiquity should be studying all ancient texts, including the nasty ones, regardless of how these texts may be used in contemporary polemics. In practice, however, things are not so simple, since I am fully aware of the fact that in the past it was mainly Jewish apostates and converts to Christianity who provided their new coreligionists with damning evidence of the Jews' anti-Christian animosity. Being a proud Jew, I hate the thought that I might be following their example. Moreover, I shudder at the thought of current and future antisemites using the fruits of my academic labours in their anti-Jewish speeches and actions. But I also shudder at the thought that those Jews who persist in the age-old practice of reading *Toledot Yeshu* on Christmas Eve will use my edition of its earliest version as proof of its antiquity and authority.

And yet, ignoring ancient polemical texts and hoping that they would somehow be forgotten, or explaining them away as mere jests, is no solution either, for—as Freud had taught us long ago—what is repressed tends to return with a haunting vengeance. Or, if I may borrow an apt metaphor from a poet who did not always hide his own antisemitic views, a corpse which is planted in a garden tends to sprout in unexpected places. Thus, although the first few decades after the Holocaust were characterized by the apparent decline of antisemitism, which was no longer accepted in respectable society in Europe and the United States, we now seem to have entered a new phase, in which anti-Jewish sentiments and stereotypes are again rearing their ugly head. And in the Jewish world, and especially in Israel, life in a world in which Christianity is no longer a direct threat, and in which Jews occasionally have power over Christians, has enabled some Jews to breathe new life into their ancient hatred of the Cross and all that it signifies.

Such issues are far from abstract background worries, and can impinge on the scholarly endeavour itself. Should I use the word ‘protocols’, which is a loaded term in the history of modern antisemitism? May I use the name ‘Yeshu’, which carries with it the baggage of anti-Christian etymologies appended to it by medieval Jews? Should I speak of Yeshu’s ‘corpse’ being maltreated by the Jews, or would ‘body’ be a less offensive term in such a context? And should I dig into the scars of long-forgotten altercations between Jews and Christians in late antiquity, in order to contextualize the text which I am reconstructing? Such questions kept on popping up as I was working on the present volume, and

as I was presenting parts thereof to colleagues and friends. Moreover, such questions clearly bothered some of the text's earlier copyists and translators, who tried to tone down some of the polemical statements which sounded too offensive to their own ears. And yet, as an academic historian my ultimate devotion is to Clio, and my aim is to reconstruct even a nasty polemical text without any polemics or apologetics, and with a dogged commitment to the highest standards of philological and historical analysis. Whether I have succeeded in this task, and whether the result justifies the great efforts I have invested in it, is only for you, the reader, to decide.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The seeds of the present study were planted in June 2015, when I attended a conference on *Toledot Yeshu* in Bern, organized by Daniel Barbu. It was during the conference that I realized for the first time that not only the Aramaic fragments of *Toledot Yeshu*, but also those in Hebrew and Judaeo–Arabic, were of great significance for the reconstruction of its textual history. Having found several such fragments during my many years of research in the Cairo Genizah, I decided to make use of the new fragments in reconstructing the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*. I then received a grant for this purpose from the Israel Science Foundation,¹ which also enabled me to employ two talented research assistants: Hagai Dvir, whose observations and suggestions are embedded in numerous places in the present study, and Aviam Ben-Naim, whose expertise as an Arabist was instrumental in the decipherment and translation of the Judaeo–Arabic fragments. Without their assistance, this volume would never have been completed.

Special thanks are also due to Willem Smelik, who has followed and supported my study of *Toledot Yeshu* from its earliest days, and shared with me his unpublished synopsis of the textual evidence of the ‘Pilate’ recension that were available to him, as well as his important edition of the fragment that I have called

¹ ISF Grant #2290/19, ‘Reconstructing the “Pilate” Recension of *Toledot Yeshu*’, 2019–2022.

Harkavy-B. I also cherish our many conversations on *Toledot Yeshu*, its language, and its textual history.

Some of my earliest thoughts on *Toledot Yeshu* were developed in conversations with Elchanan Reiner, especially during a seminar we co-taught at Tel-Aviv University in 2011/12, in which we devoted several meetings to the ‘Pilate’ and the ‘Helena’ recensions of *Toledot Yeshu*, and discussed their possible late-antique and medieval contexts. As the attentive reader of the present study will surely note, these discussions have helped shape my own views on the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*.

Many other people have helped me along the way. Miriam Goldstein shared with me her own research on the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, helped me decipher some of the more difficult Judaeo–Arabic passages in the ‘Pilate’ recension, and patiently read my complete manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions for improvement. Edna Engel and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger were always ready to share their expertise in matters of paleography and codicology. Michael Sokoloff and Ohad Abudraham provided many useful comments on the language of the Aramaic fragments. Roni Cohen read with me the Yiddish versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. Ben Outhwaite facilitated my many visits to the Cambridge Genizah collections, and provided me with excellent photographs, including multispectral images of some of the most effaced fragments. Havva Charm Zellner provided me with excellent photographs of the relevant manuscripts and Cairo Genizah fragments from the Jewish Theological Seminary Library in New York. Geoffrey Khan, Anne Burberry, and Tamar Karni facilitated the publishing process, from my first conversation

with Geoffrey about this project to the final stages of copy-editing the entire volume. And I have also benefitted from numerous conversations and email exchanges with Daphne Baratz, Daniel Barbu, Jonatan Benarroch, Yaacov Deutsch, Saskia Dönitz, William Horbury, Yedidah Koren, Julia Krivoruchko, Hindy Najman, Hillel Newman, Sacha Stern, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, Adi Wiener, and Holger Zellentin.

Finally, it is my pleasant duty to thank the European Research Council, whose grant enabled me to complete my work on *Toledot Yeshu* and publish it as a part of a much larger project, which seeks to reconstruct more newly-discovered Jewish texts from late antiquity.² The present volume is the first major output of this project, but others will follow soon.

² ERC Advanced Grant #101097998, ‘The Jewish Library in Late Antiquity: Forgotten Texts and Non-Rabbinic Jews’, 2023–2028.

1. INTRODUCTION

I. *Toledot Yeshu* and Its Study

Toledot Yeshu is the name given to polemical Jewish texts that purport to relate the true facts about the life and death of Jesus and about the early history of the Christian church. These texts were quite popular in the Jewish world from late antiquity onwards, and are extant in numerous copies in Aramaic, Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, and Judaeo-Persian. The popularity of these anti-Christian texts was not lost on many Christian authors, from Agobard and Amulo of Lyons in the ninth century, through Raymund Martin in the thirteenth century, Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid in the fourteenth century and Thomas Ebendorfer in the fifteenth century, to Johann Christoph Wagenseil in the late-seventeenth century and Johann Jacob Huldreich in the early-eighteenth.¹ But despite the great popularity of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts among Jews, modern scholarship was far from enthusiastic about these texts, which are characterised by a strong anti-Christian bias and by a low literary level, and it was only in 1902 that a comprehensive study was first devoted to them.² This pioneering study by Samuel Krauss was followed by the gradual publication of more textual witnesses to *Toledot*

¹ For *Toledot Yeshu*'s Christian readers, see Deutsch (2011).

² Krauss (1902). The following survey of previous scholarship on *Toledot Yeshu* is deliberately brief, and touches only on the most important publications. Many more studies will be cited throughout the present volume.

Yeshu, including some fragments from the Cairo Genizah that clearly preserve some very early versions of this literature (and we shall discuss these fragments below), but little was done by way of a systematic re-examination of the entire corpus.³ Such a re-examination was only carried out in 1971, in an unpublished, but widely read, PhD dissertation by William Horbury.⁴ In his dissertation, Horbury catalogued and analysed the direct and indirect textual witnesses to *Toledot Yeshu*, paying special attention to the earlier strata of this textual tradition and to their possible context in late-antique Jewish-Christian polemics. This is an issue to which we shall return below, but with the aid of new textual evidence, which was as yet unavailable to Horbury.

In 1982, Günter Schlichting edited and translated one late version of *Toledot Yeshu*, to which he added a detailed introduction and commentary, and in 1984 Jean-Pierre Osier offered an introduction and a French translation of several *Toledot Yeshu* texts and related materials.⁵ A more substantial breakthrough came in 1985, when Riccardo Di Segni published his own comprehensive analysis of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts.⁶ Di Segni's major contribution was his classification of the different textual witnesses into three distinct groups, according to the identity of the person presiding over the trial of Yeshu: Pontius Pilate, Queen

³ As an exception to the rule, I note the speculative, but very learned, study by Schonfield (1937).

⁴ Horbury (1971).

⁵ Schlichting (1982); Osier (1984), reprinted as Osier (1999).

⁶ Di Segni (1985); and cf. Di Segni (1984); for the difficulties he encountered, see Di Segni (2022).

Helena, or King Herod. This classification has become the basis of all subsequent studies and is of the utmost importance for the present study, which is devoted exclusively to the texts in which the Roman governor Pilatus, and the Roman emperor Tiberi(n)us, preside over the trial and execution of Yeshu and those associated with him.

The year 2000 saw another major breakthrough, when Yaacov Deutsch published a complete Hebrew version of the ‘Pilate’ recension, which until then had only been attested in Aramaic fragments that did not cover the entire text.⁷ As we shall see below (in our description of Heb1), this specific copy includes a long interpolation which was added as a preface to the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic text of the ‘Pilate’ recension, and thus provides a somewhat misleading point of entry for the study of this recension, but it nevertheless remains an important textual witness for this recension.

In recent years, a new effort was made to assemble all the textual witnesses pertaining to *Toledot Yeshu*, in a two-volume set accompanied by an online database and produced by a group of scholars led by Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer.⁸ Unfortunately, both the book and the database are marred by numerous errors and omissions, and when it comes to the ‘Pilate’ recension, which is the focus of the present study, the book presents a misleading picture of the textual evidence.⁹ This is due to a misguided

⁷ Deutsch (2000).

⁸ Meerson and Schäfer (2014).

⁹ Some of these deficiencies were noted by Stökl Ben Ezra (2016).

classification of the textual witnesses of the ‘Pilate’ recension into different textual branches, to partial or faulty transcriptions of many of the manuscripts, and to a complete disregard for the Judaeo–Arabic textual witnesses, even those that had already been mentioned by earlier scholars.¹⁰

Finally, we should mention the recent publication and analysis of the Judaeo–Arabic textual witnesses of the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, by Miriam Goldstein.¹¹ This excellent monograph sheds much light on the possible origins of that recension and on its later transformations, and can therefore be seen as complementing the present study, which seeks to reconstruct the earliest stratum of the *Toledot Yeshu* literature, as preserved in the ‘Pilate’ recension, and to study its textual transmission.

The aims of the present study are quite straightforward: To assemble all the textual witnesses pertaining to the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, to edit them in a synoptic manner, to study the relations between them, and to try to contextualise the original text from which they are all descended in its late-antique social and historical contexts. In this way, I hope to enable other

¹⁰ For faulty classifications of the textual witnesses see, for example, our notes on Ar3 and on Heb4, below. For partial transcriptions, see our notes on Heb2 and Heb3. The faulty transcriptions are too numerous to be listed, but see, for example, Horbury (2020, 21–22), and cf. our notes on Ar4, for faulty measurements of this fragment. For the Judaeo–Arabic manuscripts known to them, see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:45–46).

¹¹ Goldstein (2023).

scholars to shed more light on the complex issue of Jewish-Christian and Christian-Jewish relations in late antiquity.

My research is based both on the work of previous scholars and on my own identification of several new textual witnesses—in Aramaic, Judaeo-Arabic, and Hebrew—which allow for a much fuller reconstruction of this text than has previously been possible. It is grounded first and foremost in the detailed philological analysis of all the available textual witnesses, in an attempt to learn whether they all go back to a single Urtext, whether that Urtext can be reconstructed, and how this text was modified by its translators, redactors and copyists. Only once this question is settled, can we turn to a meaningful discussion of the ultimate origins and historical significance of this text. It is for this reason that I begin my study by describing the direct and indirect textual witnesses to the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, move on to the question of the relations between the textual witnesses and the question of an Urtext, analyse the contents, structure, title and genre of the text, and discuss its date, provenance and historical context. These introductory chapters are followed by a synoptic edition and translation of, as well as a commentary on, each part of the text. In my commentaries, I have tried to note the similarities and the differences between the extant textual witnesses for each passage, and to suggest which textual variants are likely to be older. I have also tried to illuminate the text by pointing to parallels and comparanda in other Jewish, Christian and ‘pagan’ texts of late antiquity, and to allusions to our text, or borrowings from it, in later Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources.

In my edition, I have numbered each major scene, from **1** to **9** (and **0** for the interpolated scene at the beginning of Heb1), and divided each scene into smaller passages, which are numbered consecutively (**1.1–1.3**, **2.1–2.3**, **3.1–3.8**, etc.). For the contents of each scene and each passage, see the table of contents at the beginning of this volume.

II. The Textual Witnesses

Unlike the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, which is attested in numerous manuscripts and in many languages, the ‘Pilate’ recension is attested in a relatively small number of manuscripts in Aramaic, Judaeo–Arabic and Hebrew, dating from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, and is cited or paraphrased by only a few medieval authors, whose dates range from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. In what follows, I examine each of these sources, focusing first on the direct textual witnesses and then on the indirect ones.

II.1. Direct Textual Witnesses

The ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu* is currently attested in fourteen textual witnesses, of which five are in Aramaic, three are in Judaeo–Arabic, and six are in Hebrew. In what follows, I offer a detailed description of each textual witness, beginning with a description of the manuscript in which it is found, including its physical features and its postulated date.¹² In those few

¹² All the dates provided below are based on palaeography, and are only tentative. I am grateful to Edna Engel for her palaeographical analyses.

cases where the extant manuscript preserves other texts besides *Toledot Yeshu*, I note which texts it includes, in order to see the ‘manuscript context’ of our text, and what this might tell us about the text’s function or its postulated readership.¹³ I also describe the text itself, the narrative passages it preserves (for which cf. Appendix 1, which provides a synoptic view of the textual passages preserved in all the direct textual witnesses), and its overall textual qualities.¹⁴ I also note in which language the biblical verses are cited in each manuscript, as well as the spelling of the names ‘Yeshu’ and ‘Pilatus’, as there are numerous differences between the manuscripts on this score; the number following each spelling is the number of occurrences in the extant text, and if no spelling is given it means that the name is not mentioned in the extant text.

II.1.1. Aramaic 1 (Ar1)—Cambridge, T-S Misc. 35.87

Paper; a bifolium, 20 × 29.8 cm; 32–34 lines per page; several small holes; most of the writing on the first page, and some of the writing on the subsequent pages, is badly effaced, and only some of the readings could be improved with the aid of a multispectral

¹³ The importance of *Toledot Yeshu*’s ‘manuscript context’ was also highlighted by Goldstein (2019).

¹⁴ Images of all the Genizah fragments mentioned below are available on the Friedberg Genizah website, at <https://fjms.genizah.org>.

image.¹⁵ Oriental hand, eleventh–twelfth century. The scribe occasionally uses elongated letters at the end of lines as line-fillers. Two words are vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). The four pages are read consecutively, so either this was the central bifolium of a quire, or it was part of an irregular quire, in which the bifolia were folded one after the other and not one inside the other. Such irregular quires are not uncommon in the Cairo Genizah, and note, for example, our description of JA1, below.

The beginning of the text is missing, and the extant text runs from 5.4 to the end of the narrative; the missing part would have covered between one and two additional pages. The end of our text is followed by two or more small textual units that deal with unrelated topics and may have been written by different hands: (*) A short Judaeo–Arabic text titled אַסְמֵא אֶלְטִיּוֹר אֶלְתִּי פִי אַסְמֵא [יום], ‘The names of the birds which are (listed) in (the Torah pericope) “And it was on [the (eighth) day]” (i.e., Lev. 9.1ff)’ and consisting of Saadiah Gaon’s translation of Lev. 11.13–19.¹⁶ (*) A

¹⁵ This fragment was first published by Ginzberg (1928, 329–35); it was re-published, with improved readings, by Horbury (1970, 116–21); see also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:5, 52–56). As the first page of this bifolium is almost completely effaced, my reading of passages 5.4–6.6 is mostly based on that of Horbury (1970, 117), with some improvements which were made possible by a multispectral image and the parallel versions.

¹⁶ This *parasha*, which is also known as *parashat shemini*, is usually read in the synagogue around the time of the Passover holiday (depending on whether it is a regular year or a leap-year). If we assume that our text was read in public around Passover, this may provide a clue to the appearance of this textual unit. However, the next textual unit fits better in the context of the New Year rituals.

discussion in Judaeo–Arabic of the different types of *shofar*-blows, which is ultimately based on bt RH 34a (but is badly effaced). The rest of the page seems to have been left blank, but may also be entirely effaced. The logic underlying the copying of these textual units after our text is not entirely clear.

The text of Ar1 is characterised by numerous scribal errors, including שמך instead of שמו in 5.5, אנקה instead of ינקה in 5.6, לויתיה for לויתיה in 6.3, דינעני for דיתעני in 6.9,¹⁷ בתריה instead of ברתייה in 6.13, מרעתי for מערתא and איתפתי for איתפתח in 7.6, and לשמיה for לשמיה in 9.2.

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew in 5.5–5.9 and in 6.10, but in Aramaic in 8.1, 8.3, and 8.7.

Spelling of personal names: יישו x 24; פילטוס x 6, פלטוס x 1, א(א)ליגוס x 2.

II.1.2. Aramaic 2 (Ar2)—Cambridge, T-S Misc. 35.88

Paper; a single folio, 21.2 x 15.5 cm; 17–19 lines per page; a small part is missing, and there are some small holes; some of the writing is effaced, and the reading was improved with the aid of a multispectral image.¹⁸ Oriental hand, twelfth–thirteenth century. From ca. line 5 of the verso, the letters and spaces between the lines are smaller, and may indicate a change of scribe. The scribe(s) leave(s) a larger space between words at the end of each

¹⁷ Note also our suggestion that וידכר in 6.11 is an error for ודכר.

¹⁸ This fragment was first published by Ginzberg (1928, 336–38); see also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:5, 54–55).

sentence. There are no line-fillers. Two words are vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). The extant text runs from 7.1 to 8.6, and displays few scribal errors, with the exception of איתוא instead of איתוהי in 7.2. The text of Ar2 is close to that of Ar1, and the differences between the two texts are mostly dialectical, with Ar2 presenting more Palestinian Jewish Aramaic grammatical forms than Ar1 or any of the other Aramaic fragments (for more on this, see below, section III.3). However, it would be difficult to posit the chronological priority of one text over the other, as in 7.6 it would seem that Ar1 preserves an earlier version of the text, but in 7.7 it is difficult to tell whether Ar1 or Ar2 preserve an earlier version (see below, in our comments on both passages). And as both textual witnesses are only fragmentarily preserved, there are no other passages for which such a comparison can be carried out.

Biblical verses are cited in Aramaic in 8.1, and 8.3.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 5.

II.1.3. Aramaic 3 (Ar3)—Cambridge, T-S NS 298.56 + New York, JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)

T-S NS 298.56: Paper; a single folio, 18.2 x 13.8 cm; the folio is almost completely preserved, but there are several small holes.¹⁹ Oriental hand, twelfth–thirteenth century. The scribe uses

¹⁹ This fragment was first published by Falk (1977 and 1978), whose readings were immediately corrected by Boyarin (1978); see also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:6, 60–61, where the fragment is erroneously labelled as T.-S. Misc. 298.56).

wedge-like signs as line-fillers. Two words are partly vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). The extant text runs from 4.1 to 5.1.

JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2): Paper; a bifolium, of which the top part is missing, 12.2 x 27 cm. Oriental hand, twelfth/thirteenth-century.²⁰ The scribe uses wedge-like signs as line-fillers, and sometimes writes the last word in the line at a 45-degree angle, upwards or downwards. Six words are partly or fully vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). The extant text runs from 5.9 to 6.6 and from 8.7 to 9.2 (in both cases, with large lacunae, as the top of each folio is missing).

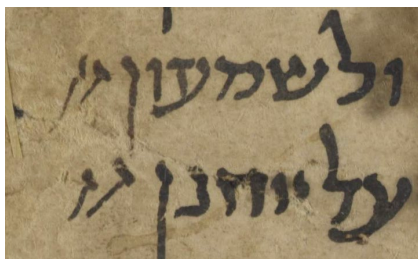
The handwriting on both fragments is identical, and both use the same—highly unusual—wedge-like symbols as line-fillers (see Figure 1). It is therefore certain that they were written by the same scribe. Moreover, both call Pilate אגליטוס (see Figure 2) and refer to Yehudah as גגאד, rather than גגא (see below, 4.2 and 8.9). The page-width of both fragments is virtually identical, thus making it quite clear that they stem from a single manuscript.²¹ Moreover, the scribe who wrote this manuscript also wrote T-S NS 224.123, which is described below (JA3).

²⁰ This fragment was first published by Krauss (1902, 36–37, 143–46); it was re-edited by him in Krauss (1911, 28–30); see also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:28, 56–57).

²¹ And cf. Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:49, 58), who classify JTS 2529.2 as ‘Early Oriental A’, and T-S NS 298.56 as ‘Early Oriental B’.

Figure 1: Wedge-like line-fillers in T-S NS 298.56 and JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)

T-S NS 298.56



JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)

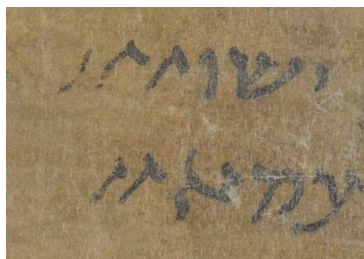
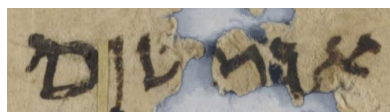
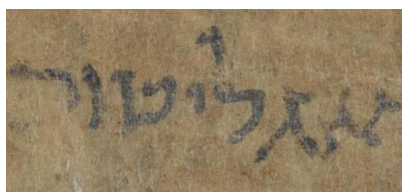


Figure 2: Pilate's Name in T-S NS 298.56 and JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)

T-S NS 298.56²²



JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)



The structure of the original manuscript cannot be determined with certainty. If it was a quinion, as is common in Cairo Genizah manuscripts, then we should assume that there were two folios before T-S NS 298.56 (for passages 1.1 to 3.8), one folio between it and the first folio of JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2) (for passages 5.2 to 5.8), one bifolium between the two folios of JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2) (for passages 6.7 to 8.6), and then the folio which formed a bifolium with T-S NS 298.56, followed by one more folio. In such a case, the manuscript probably contained another text after the end of our text, since the passages from 9.3 to the end of the narrative would have required much less than

²² Note that the *lamed* is tilted, because of a movement of the paper; this movement is also evident on the other side of the folio.

two folios. And as the width of the folio in T-S NS 224.123 is virtually identical with that of T-S NS 298.56, it is quite possible that they stem from the same manuscript, in which the Aramaic version of our text was followed by its Judaeo-Arabic translation, JA3.²³ And as the text of JA3 begins in passage 2.3, it may even have formed the last folio of the same quire, with its text continuing into the next quire.

For the passages from 4.1 to 5.1, Ar3 is our only Aramaic textual witness, and therefore cannot be compared with the other Aramaic textual witnesses. However, its text clearly is faulty in several places, including עבדתון for צביתון in 4.1, and the spelling פרחיה for פרחיה in 4.2 and אגל[י]טוס in 4.3. In those passages where we can compare Ar3 with other Aramaic texts, its errors become even more glaring. In 5.9, it replaces the Aramaic שטיא with the Hebrew שוטה and has יכבדינִי instead of יכבדנִי. In 6.1 it has אגליטוס הגמונאה, displaying both the corruption of Pilate's name and the inclusion of two definite markers at the end of the word הגמון. In 8.7 it has יתִיהִי instead of יתהון, and מחיי instead of מחוי or מחוי, and in 8.9 it has גמר instead of גר or גר, and it calls Yeshu בן פנדריה. In 9.1 it has סיכא, probably instead of סימא, and in 9.2 it has סער instead of סגר.

²³ The possibility that the fragments belong in the same manuscript is also supported by the physical shapes of JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2) and T-S NS 224.123, as both fragments are lacking their top part, preserve the bottom eight or nine lines of text, and display a similar form of tear, all indicating that the manuscript was torn when these two fragments were still folded in the same quire. However, within such a scenario it is harder to explain why T-S NS 298.56 is fully preserved.

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew in 5.9, but in Aramaic in 8.7.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 11; אגליטוס x 2.

II.1.4. Aramaic 4 (Ar4)—New York, JTS 2529.1 (Adler 2102.1)

Paper; a single folio; 16.4 x 12.3 cm;²⁴ two large holes; some of the writing is effaced; 18–19 lines per page.²⁵ Oriental hand, twelfth/thirteenth-century. The scribe uses elongated letters, or the first letters of the first word in the next line, as line-fillers.²⁶ Two words are vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). The extant text runs from the middle of 8.1 to 9.2 (but omits 8.8), and closely parallels that of Ar1. It is relatively free of scribal errors, except for recurrent misreadings of the ending ן- as א- (see our comments on 8.3, 8.6 and 8.11) and a dittography in 8.1.

Biblical verses are cited in Aramaic in 8.3 and in 8.7.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 3, יישו x 3;²⁷ פלטוס x 3.

²⁴ Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:27) give the size as 36.5 x 25.3, but this is the size of the modern paper which serves as a frame for the much smaller Genizah fragment.

²⁵ This fragment was first published by Adler (1911); it was re-edited by Krauss (1911, 30–31); see also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:27, 55–57).

²⁶ Elongated letters: See recto, lines 10 (elongated א), 12 (elongated ב), and 17 (elongated ת of יתי); verso lines 4 (elongated ד) and 18 (elongated א). First letters of next word: See recto, lines 1 (סלקית < סֶלֶ) and 12 (ב' < בקושטא).

²⁷ Two of the three instances with double yod are דיישו (and cf. Ar4's דישימא in 8.1 and דימרד in 8.9), but in the third instance, the name יישו is not preceded by a genitive marker.

II.1.5. Aramaic 5 (Ar5)—Manchester, JRL B 3791

Paper; a single folio; 12.9 x 8.3 cm; two large holes. Some of the text has darkened, and is hard to read; 10–12 lines per page.²⁸ Oriental hand, eleventh century. The scribe uses the first letters of the first word in the next line as line-fillers. There is no vocalisation. The extant text runs from the end of 5.8 to the beginning of 6.3.

In 5.9, Ar5 writes איתקרי instead of את קרי or אתקרי שמך, and, like Ar3, it uses the Hebrew word for שטיא, but gives it a quasi-Aramaic ending, שוטא. However, this fragment is so small that its overall textual quality cannot be assessed.

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew in 5.8–5.9.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 2.

II.1.6. Judaeo-Arabic 1 (JA1)—Cambridge, T-S NS 298.55 + T-S 8 Ka 7.4 + London, BL Or. 6197.7–8²⁹

Paper; three bifolia, well preserved, but for a few small holes in T-S 8 Ka 7.4 and BL Or. 6197.7–8, and larger holes on the top part of T-S NS 298.55; 16.5–17 x 24.5–26 cm.³⁰ Oriental hand,

²⁸ The fragment was first published by Bohak (2018).

²⁹ The three Genizah fragments are read consecutively, and are therefore described here as a single manuscript.

³⁰ T-S NS 298.55 was correctly identified by whoever placed it next to T-S NS 298.56 (Ar3) and the other *Toledot Yeshu* fragments in T-S NS 298, and was mentioned by Horbury (1971, 41); Di Segni (1985, 226); Goldstein (2010, 31*); however, Meerson and Schäfer state that its identification as *Toledot Yeshu* is questionable (2014, II:45). The other two fragments have thus far gone unnoticed. All three fragments are published here for the first time.

eleventh/twelfth-century.³¹ 13–18 lines per page. In each bifolium, the text is read consecutively, thus showing that this was not a regular quire, in which the bifolia are folded inside each other, but an irregular one, in which each bifolium is folded side-by-side with the next one. The handwriting is quite crude, and the entire manuscript probably was written by a quasi-professional scribe.

The top part of T-S NS 298.55 is only partly preserved, but it is quite certain that our text began at the beginning of the first page of this bifolium (see below, the synopsis for 1.1). Our text ends in the middle of the second page of BL Or. 6197.7–8, and is followed by several different textual units: (*) A short Hebrew praise of God, beginning נתח(ל) זה השבח (בש(ם) רחמ(נא) 'In the Name of the Merciful One, we shall begin this praise'. This is a rhymed acrostic *piyyut*, which breaks off after the letter *zayin*.³² (*) A וידוי לנהרואני ז' צ' ל' 'A confession prayer by Nahrwani, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing', beginning with רבון כל העולמים קודם כל דבר, 'Master of all the universe, before any thing'. This is a well-known Hebrew *piyyut*, by Nissi al-Nahrwani (Baghdad, early tenth century), the first known *payyetan* from Babylonia.³³ The text runs to the end of the fourth page of BL Or. 6197.7–8, and clearly continued into the next bifolium, which has yet to be identified. The presence of these two *piyyutim* might

³¹ See also Goldstein 2021a, 89, n. 17, for an eleventh-century dating.

³² The text itself runs אפתח פי ואהודה לשוכן שמימה ברא ארץ בחכמה גדול :ומהלל בפי כל הנשמה, etc.

³³ See Beer (2014).

point to a liturgical, or synagogal, context for this manuscript, including our text, but may also be a mere coincidence.

There is no doubt that JA1 was translated directly from an Aramaic source text, but either this was not a very faithful translation, or the translated text was redacted and modified in the course of its own transmission. Thus, in some instances it looks more like a paraphrase of the Aramaic text(s) than a translation thereof (e.g., 8.5). Moreover, in some cases it abridges the Aramaic text(s) (e.g., 5.6, 8.11), but in others it actually expands them (e.g., 6.6). One interesting feature of this text is the recurrent incorporation of terminology that is borrowed from the translator's Muslim environment, including God's epithets *גל ועז* (6.10 and 7.6), references to Yeshu's followers as his *אצחאב* (8.1), the contrasts between *אצול* and *פרוע* (6.1) and between *חק* and *באטל* (8.5), and the notion of books 'coming down' from heaven (6.5). JA1 also changes the claim made by Yeshu and Yoḥanan that they are 'sons of God', and has them claiming only that they are 'friends of God', in line with the Muslim insistence that God has no children (6.5 and 6.11).

Another noteworthy feature is the translator's attempt to tone down some of the nasty references to Yeshu, this too probably a reflection of his Muslim environment. In the Muslim world, Jesus was described as 'the Messiah, 'Isa son of Maryam, the messenger of Allah and his word', and was seen as the most important of the pre-Islamic prophets.³⁴ Furthermore, in the Muslim world

³⁴ See Qur'an 4.171, and cf. 4.157, 4.163. For attitudes towards Jesus in the Muslim world, see Lazarus-Yafeh (1975/76); Hayek (1959); Khalidi (2001); Meshky (2021).

Jews did not feel threatened by Christianity, and therefore could tone down some of their anti-Christian polemics.³⁵ Thus, whereas in the Aramaic and the Hebrew texts Yeshu is frequently labelled ‘the wicked’ (הרשע/רשיעא), in JA1 this epithet is applied to him only rarely, when he is called ‘the accursed Yeshu’ (ישו אללעין) in 8.3, and ישו אלמלעון in 8.7) or ‘Yeshu the heretic’ (ישו אלמארק) in 8.9, 9.5, and probably also 1.1). These five occurrences may be compared with the twelve occurrences of ישו הרשע in Heb1 (without including the introductory interpolation), as a demonstration of JA1’s tendency to avoid this epithet. Equally revealing is JA1’s transformation of the curses heaped upon those who worship Yeshu and those who say that he ascended to Heaven into curses against heretics and idol worshippers in 9.2 (and cf. 9.4). This tendency might also explain JA1’s omission of the passages where Yeshu is interrogated about his ancestors and explains that his real father is Pandera (3.2–3.5). In JA1, Yeshu probably tells his interrogators that he is the son of Yoḥanan the Dyer, but the claim that he was the son of Pandera and a *mamzer* is entirely omitted (see below, our comments on 1.1 and 3.1). Later in the narrative, JA1 omits both the passages where Yoḥanan is interrogated about the books of magic and about Yeshu’s disciples (4.4–4.6) and the description of how Yeshu’s disciples were caught (5.1–5.3), but the reason for these omissions is less clear. One possible explanation is that the translator or redactor of JA1 noticed that the account of Yeshu’s eleven (or twelve) disciples,

³⁵ See Lasker (1991) and Alexander (2011, 149–57).

of which only five were executed, is extremely confused (see below, our comments on 5.2 and 5.4), and solved this difficulty by speaking of only five disciples.

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew in 5.5–5.9 and in 9.5, but in Judaeo–Arabic in 8.7 and 9.4.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 22; פלטוס x 3.

II.1.7. Judaeo–Arabic 2 (JA2)—Cambridge, T-S NS 246.24

Paper; a bifolium, marred by numerous small holes; 15.9 x 24.7 cm; 17–18 lines per page.³⁶ Oriental hand, thirteenth century or earlier.³⁷ The fourth page was left blank, because the writing on page 3 was showing through the thin paper; moreover, the ink subsequently corroded the paper in many places, thus making the reading much more difficult. Three non-consecutive pages, covering the text from the middle of 5.9 to 6.6 and from the end of 8.1 to 8.7. It is not clear whether in the original quire there was a single folio between the two folios of NS 246.24 (in which case it would have been an irregular quire), or a bifolium, and it is possible that it too was a bifolium on which only three pages were written.³⁸

³⁶ This fragment was correctly identified by Di Segni (1984, 91); Shvitzel and Niessen (2006, 298); Goldstein (2010, 31*). It is published here for the first time.

³⁷ For a twelfth-century dating, see Goldstein (2021a, 89, n. 18).

³⁸ The text between 6.6 and the end of 8.1 runs to some 320 words in JA1, and as each folio of JA2 contains ca. 130 words, it seems as if we are missing 2.5 pages of text between the two folios of NS 246.24.

As there are numerous passages in which JA1 and JA2 overlap, they may easily be compared, and the comparison shows that they represent two different translations of the Aramaic text. Moreover, the many overlaps between JA2 and the Aramaic fragments show that with a few minor exceptions (see our comments on 8.2), JA2 provides a faithful translation of the Aramaic text on which it was based, and is especially close to the Aramaic text of Ar1. It provides none of the paraphrastic additions and Islamic terminology of JA1 (see, for example, our comments on 6.1, 6.5 and 8.5),³⁹ and is not troubled by the claim made by Yesu and Yoḥanan that they are ‘sons of God’ (6.5). And unlike JA1, it has no qualms about referring to Yesu as ישו אלפאסק, ‘Yesu the heretic’, in 6.1 and 8.3, and as ישו אלט'אלם, ‘Yesu the wicked’, in 8.5.

One peculiar feature of JA2 is its use of the rare word יבאני for ‘(Yehudah) the gardener’.

Biblical verses are cited in Judaeo–Arabic in 5.9, 8.1, 8.3 and 8.7. Interestingly, Deut. 21.23 is translated as לא תבית גתתה in 8.1, and probably also in 8.3, but as לא תבית נבילתה in 8.7, the second translation reflecting the Aramaic text from which it was translated (and see our comments ad loc.).

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 8; פליטוס x 3, פלטוס x 1.

³⁹ The only exception being the notion of books ‘coming down’ from heaven, for which see our comments on 6.5.

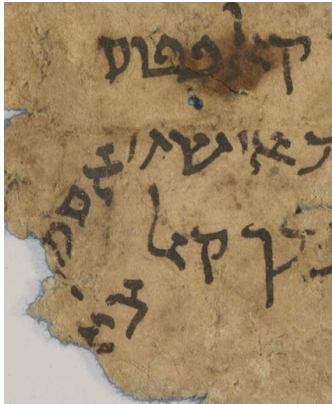
II.1.8. Judaeo–Arabic 3 (JA3)—Cambridge, T-S NS

224.123

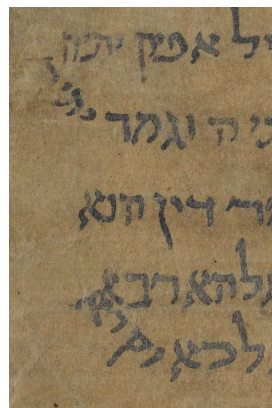
Paper; a single folio; the top part is missing; 12 x 13.7 cm. Oriental hand, twelfth/thirteenth century.⁴⁰ The handwriting is identical with that of Ar3, and the scribe uses the same wedge-like signs as line-fillers, and sometimes writes the last word in the line at a 45-degree angle, upwards or downwards (see Figure 3, for both phenomena). In the extant text, no words are vocalised.

Figure 3: Wedge-like line-fillers and diagonal words at ends of lines in T-S NS 224.123, and diagonal words at ends of lines in JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)

T-S NS 224.123



JTS 2529.2 (Adler 2102.2)



⁴⁰ This fragment was correctly identified by Shvitiel and Niessen (2006, 254); Goldstein (2010, 31*). It is published here for the first time.

The extant text runs from the end of 2.3 to the beginning of 3.8, with a lacuna in 3.6. As noted above, this fragment may have come from the same manuscript as Ar3; moreover, as the same scribe copied both texts, it is possible that he copied both the Aramaic and the Judaeo-Arabic texts from pre-existing manuscripts, but it is also possible that he translated the text himself. Unfortunately, there is no overlap between the Aramaic and Judaeo-Arabic texts, nor does JA3 preserve the name given to Pilatus, which in the extant passages of Ar3 is given as אגליטוס.

The text covered by JA3 is not preserved in any of the Aramaic textual witnesses, so it is difficult to analyse the translation it preserves. However, there is little doubt that it preserves a translation that is different from that of JA1, as may be seen from the few places where they overlap (see especially 3.7). Given the paucity of the extant text, it is not clear whether it is the same translation as in JA2, or yet another translation, but the former possibility seems more likely.⁴¹

There are no citations of biblical verses in the extant text.

Spelling of personal names: יֵשׁוּעַ x 1.

⁴¹ As support for the assumption that JA2 and JA3 represent a single translation, we may note that both use the expression מִן חֻקָּא, ‘in truth’ (JA2 in 8.5, JA3 in 3.7), both translate the recurrent phrase מַתִּיב וְאָמַר as אַגְלִיטוס (JA2 in 8.7 and 6.2 (but cf. 6.1 אַסְתַּגְלִיטוס וְאָבִי), JA3 in 3.8), and both speak of Yeshu misleading אֵלְכִילֵק, ‘the world’ (JA2 in 6.1 and 6.2, JA3 in 3.7). On the other hand, we may note the spelling יֵשׁוּ in JA2 vs. יֵשׁוּעַ in JA3.

II.1.9. Hebrew 1 (Heb1)—St. Petersburg, RNL EVR 1.274,
Fols 21v–27v⁴²

A paper quire (quaternion); no water-marks; each folio is 14.7 x 10.5 cm.⁴³ The folios are well preserved, except for the lower margins, which are slightly damaged. The first page of the quire, as well as the last 2.5 pages, are blank, and it is clear that our text was copied as a self-standing unit. A colophon at the end of the text (see below, 9.5) identifies the copyist as Israel son of Yequitiel, and states that he copied the text in 1536 CE. The writing is in a Byzantine hand.

The main part of the Hebrew text shows many signs of having been translated from Aramaic, including places where the Aramaic text was left untranslated, and places where it shows through the Hebrew translation.⁴⁴ However, either Israel son of Yequitiel or an earlier copyist appended to the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic text a long introductory interpolation which was taken from some Byzantine Hebrew version of *Toledot Yeshu*, as we shall note in greater detail below (see our comments on 0.3 and 0.13, and esp. on 0.5 and 0.7). The resulting text is full of contradictions and inconsistencies, which shall also be noted below (see our comments on 0.1, 0.2, 0.8–0.12, 0.14).

⁴² MS RNL EVR 1.274 is bound together with several different quires with unrelated texts; the description below focusses solely on the quire in which our text is found.

⁴³ This manuscript was first published by Deutsch (2000). See also Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:39, 72–78).

⁴⁴ See already Deutsch (2000, 179–80), and cf. our comments on 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 3.2, 3.5, 4.3, etc.

The introductory interpolation clearly was taken from an existing *Toledot Yeshu* text, probably of the ‘Helena’ recension (even though 0.1 states that the narrative took place in the reign of King Herod, and Helena is never explicitly mentioned in the text). The impact of this text may be seen elsewhere in Heb1, in places where its text differs from that of the other textual witnesses, but is paralleled by other *Toledot Yeshu* texts, of the ‘Helena’ recension (see, for example, our comments on 8.9).

Throughout the entire text, biblical verses are cited in Hebrew.

Spelling of personal names: ישוע x 3, ישו x 20, יישו x 20;⁴⁵ פִּילְטוֹס

x 8, פִּלְטוֹס x 1, פִּלְטוֹס x 1, פִּילּוֹס x 1, אֶלְטִיגוֹס x 2, אֶיִלְיָגוֹס x 1.

II.1.10. Hebrew 2 (Heb2)—New York, JTS 8998,

Fols 4v– 6v⁴⁶

Paper; 3 bifolios, folded inside each other; fols 1r–4v contain *halakhic* discussions of the laws of menstrual purity and of the Sabbath, written by two or three different hands. Several folios are probably missing between fols 3v and 4r. Each bifolium is 22.7 x 28.8 cm. Oriental hands, thirteenth-century. This fragment is currently placed in the same envelope with Heb3, which clearly came from the Cairo Genizah (see below), and it too probably came from the Cairo Genizah, but this cannot be determined with certainty.

⁴⁵ The spelling ישוע is found only in the introductory interpolation (see below, 0.6, 0.10 and 0.11). The other two spellings alternate throughout the entire text.

⁴⁶ This text was ignored by Meerson and Schäfer (2014), and is published here for the first time.

Fol. 4r and the first two lines of fol. 4v contain the final part (from המולחו onwards) of a commentary on the thirty-nine types of labour that are forbidden on the Sabbath, as listed in m Shab 7.2. Line 3 reads 'תם אלכתאב במעונה אלרחמאן. ב', 'Here ends the book, with God's help, (may He be) b(lessed)', and this is immediately followed by our text, written by the same hand. Our text runs from 1.1 to 8.7, where it breaks off at the end of fol. 6v, and clearly continued into the next folio, which is missing. The text is close to, but not identical with, that of Heb3, and will be described in greater detail below.

Yehudah is called יהודה הפרדסי throughout.

All the biblical verses are cited in Hebrew.

Spelling of personal names: ישוע x 20, ישע x 1; פטלוס x 9.

II.1.11. Hebrew 3 (Heb3)—New York, JTS 8998,

Fols 7r–8v + Cambridge, T-S K 17.1

JTS 8998, fols 7r–8v: Paper; two separate folios, which originally formed a single bifolium; 20.1 x 27.4 cm. The two folios were placed in the same envelope as fols 1–6, no doubt because of the similarity between the two *Toledot Yeshu* texts; however, fols 7–8 differ in size from fols 1–6, were written by a different scribe, and clearly do not come from the same manuscript.⁴⁷ The text of fols 7–8 breaks off at the end of folio 8v, but continues seamlessly into Cambridge, T-S K 17.1, in the middle of 6.10. This also

⁴⁷ JTS 8998 fols 7r–8r were edited by Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:25, 59–62). However, they ignored fol. 8v for no apparent reason, and were unaware of T-S K 17.1, both of which are published here for the first time.

proves that the two folios bound as JTS 8998, fols 7r–8v stem from the Cairo Genizah.⁴⁸

Cambridge, T-S K 17.1: Paper; a single folio; 20.4 x 13.8 cm. Oriental hand, thirteenth-century, and probably a bit later than Heb2. Once combined, the two fragments preserve the entire text, which ends at the bottom of T-S K 17.1r, and is followed on the verso by several unrelated texts: (*) A short list in Hebrew, titled ואלו הן עידי קרובים, ‘and these are the relatives who are (ruled out as) witnesses’, and based on m San 3.4; (*) A brief discussion of calendrical issues in Judaeo–Arabic, titled הדא אצל חסאב, ‘this is the basis for calculating the cycles and the (turning points of the) seasons and the Jubilee and the Sabbatical year’, (*) A short Hebrew *piyyut*, beginning יכלת יי' להכיל מרבה לנטות מרומות, ‘Lord, you were able to contain much, to set up the heavens’, which ends at the bottom of the page. This may have been the last page of the manuscript, but it may also have contained additional folios.

Yehudah is called יהודה הפרדסי throughout.

All the biblical verses are cited in Hebrew.

Spelling of personal names: ישוע x 22, יש' x 1; פלטוס x 8.

There is little doubt that Heb2 and Heb3 are ultimately based on a single translation, and that this was a translation from

⁴⁸ For other fragments that clearly came from the Cairo Genizah, but ended up in the non-Genizah sections of the JTS Library collections, see Danzig (1997, xl–xlii). I am grateful to Adiel Breuer for this reference.

an Aramaic text. In several places, the Aramaic was left untranslated; in others, it shows through the Hebrew translation.⁴⁹ This translation is different from that of Heb1, as may be seen in almost every passage of our text. The fact that Yehudah is called הפרדסי, ‘the orchard-man’ (an adjective that is otherwise unattested in Hebrew) might reflect a familiarity with an Arabic text in which he was called אלבסתנבאני, as in JA2, and the reference to being a שותף with God (see 4.1 and 8.9) probably reflects the Muslim discourse of *shirk*, and is not likely to have been there in the Aramaic text. Both Heb2 and Heb3 contain several sentences that are not found in the other textual witnesses, and are likely to be later additions, including a long description of the misdeeds of Yeshu and Yoḥanan, which echoes claims from the Gospels (see our comments on 4.1), and a description of Yeshu’s drinking of vinegar, which certainly is based on the Gospel stories (see our comments on 8.1). In many other passages, Heb2 and Heb3 emerge as the least reliable textual witnesses at our disposal (see our comments on 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, etc.).

⁴⁹ Aramaic phrases in the Hebrew text: אתון נורא יקידתא (5.6); בחדבשבה (8.5); שוקיה רומיה רבתא (8.9), and cf. our comments on ואשלמהו in Heb2 in 2.2. Aramaic showing through the Hebrew translation: כד חי becomes בית הילד/ (8.5); בשיקרא עסיקים becomes אשר הוא חי (6.11); הנולד... הרחם (6.10, and cf. 6.12); and cf. our comments on גודלות את שער הנשים גדילים/גדולות (3.3), and on הלובש קרועים... המקולל בגיס (4.2). Note also the typical Aramaic word-order reflected in phrases such as כפר נחום המדינה (4.2 and 5.2) and וישאלו ל- (2.1), or expressions like יהוד המדינה (7.1).

Although Heb2 and Heb3 are based on the same Hebrew translation of the Aramaic text, they are not identical. A comparison between them suggests that Heb3 presents a slight revision of the text represented by Heb2. For example, throughout the text Heb3 corrects Pilate's name from פטלוס to פלטוס, and in 1.3 it changes האדם בני קהלות לב' לב' קהלת חכמים זכ'.⁵⁰ In 2.2, it probably omitted Heb2's ואשלמהו אליכם, which apparently reflects the Aramaic text from which Heb2 was translated (see our comments ad loc.), and in 6.5 it misread רפאות as רשות. Moreover, Heb3 suffers from some omissions of passages that must have been there in the Hebrew text, and indeed are found in Heb2 (see, for example, 4.1, 6.12, 8.5–8.6). However, Heb3 probably is not directly based on Heb2, since in some cases the divergences between them exclude a direct dependence (see, for example, our comments on 3.4 and on 6.11), and in others, it seems to preserve a more original reading (see, for example, our comments on חדבשבה in 8.5). Thus, Heb2 and Heb3 probably had a common ancestor, which each copyist retouched or garbled in his own peculiar way.

Another interesting feature of Heb2 and Heb3 is their omission of several important scenes. Both texts omit passages 7.2–7.7, which describe how Yeshu tries to flee and is caught, and as this scene is also omitted in Heb1 and in Heb5, this may reflect the omission of this scene in one branch of the Aramaic textual transmission (more on this below). But Heb3 also omits the passages 8.11–9.3 and 9.5 (Heb2 breaks off in 8.7, so we cannot tell

⁵⁰ The Aramaic texts' אוכלוסין certainly made no reference to the Sages, and they appear again only in Heb5 (see 6.3, 6.13, 8.10), and surely are a later addition to the text.

whether it too omitted these passages), and this omission is more likely to be due to textual corruption, as these passages are not missing from the other textual witnesses (except for Heb5, which also omits **8.11–9.3**), and deal with several different, and essential, elements of our text.

Given the similarity between Heb2 and Heb3, I often refer to them as a single textual witness, namely Heb2/Heb3. However, the differences between them make it necessary to print both Heb2 and Heb3 in the synopsis of each passage, rather than printing Heb3 (which is fully preserved) and pointing to the differences with Heb2 in numerous footnotes.

II.1.12. Hebrew 4 (Heb4)—Cambridge, T-S AS 121.237 +
T-S NS 329.820 + T-S AS 74.141 + Mosseri I, 81
+ T-S AS 120.189 + T-S AS 120.190

Paper; the remains of five folios, written by the same hand and belonging to the same manuscript; Oriental hand, thirteenth-century. The order of the different folios in the original manuscript may be reconstructed as follows: (1) T-S AS 121.237 (12.6 x 7.9 cm) is the right half of a folio, whose left half, and the bottom part, have yet to be identified; it preserves the title and the incipit of our text and runs (with numerous lacunae) from **1.1** to **3.3**. The text continues seamlessly into (2) T-S NS 329.820 + T-S AS 74.141 (11.4 x 10.4 cm), a folio which is missing one or two lines of text at the bottom, and has several small holes, but is otherwise well preserved. Its text runs from **3.3** to **4.1** or the beginning of **4.2**, and continues seamlessly into (3) Mosseri I, 81c (4 x 10 cm) + Mosseri I, 81b (6.1 x 6.2 cm), a folio of which only ca. 50%

are preserved. It contains the text from 4.2 to the beginning of 5.7 (with the omission of 4.4–5.3). After this folio, three more folios seem to be missing, and the next preserved folio is (4) Mosseri I, 81a, a folio that is well preserved, but for several holes. The text runs from 6.14 to 7.7, and continues seamlessly into (5) T-S AS 120.189 + T-S AS 120.190 (14.8 x 10.8 cm), a folio whose margins are well preserved, but with several lacunae. The text begins at 7.7, and breaks off at 8.6.⁵¹ The rest of the manuscript is lost. Unfortunately, the individual folios cannot be rejoined into their original bifolia, if there were any.

There is no doubt that Heb4 was translated from Aramaic, as it sometimes retains the Aramaic words of the original, and in other instances its Hebrew reflects the Aramaic from which it was translated.⁵² And in several instances, its text seems less confused, and closer to the Aramaic original, than that of the other Hebrew

⁵¹ Two of these fragments, T-S NS 329.820 and Mosseri I:81, were first published by Deutsch (2000, 185–94), and cf. Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:49, 58), who classify one fragment as ‘Early Oriental A’ and the other as ‘Early Oriental B’, even though they stem from a single manuscript. The other fragments are published here for the first time. One small fragment, Mosseri I, 81d, preserves only a few letters, and cannot be placed with certainty.

⁵² Aramaic words: E.g., גנגה in 2.3 (twice), 4.3, 7.3, 7.7 (and note the typically Palestinian Aramaic ending with a *he*, rather than an *aleph*) and מרנא in 8.5. Aramaic reflected in the Hebrew: E.g., שאלו ל- in 2.1 and 5.4, הביאו ל- in 7.2, and ראה ל- in 7.5, and cf. מגדלת שער שלנשים in 3.3, and בשקר עוסקים in 8.5. Note also 7.1, where Ar1’s ואתקינו is paralleled by Heb4’s והתקינו, and 8.4, where רהטא דמיא of the Aramaic texts is rendered in Heb4 as ה[ר]הט המים.

texts (see our comments on 3.5, 6.14, 7.1, 8.1, 8.2, and 8.5). Moreover, whereas Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 and Heb5 all omit passages 7.2–7.7, Heb4 does not. And as the text of Heb4 often differs from that of Heb1 and that of Heb2/Heb3, it probably represents a third Hebrew translation from an Aramaic source-text.

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew.

Spelling of personal names: יֵשׁוּ x 7; פִּילְטוֹס x 1.

II.1.13. Hebrew 5 (Heb5)—New York, JTS 6312

(Rab. 273) (#39169),⁵³ Fols 67b–69a

Paper; JTS 6312 is a Yemenite manuscript of *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Deuteronomy, written by Ḥayim ben Shalom al-Ḥajaj in 1653.⁵⁴ In fols 67b–69a, on the margins of the *Midrash*'s commentary on Deut. 13.7, which includes a florilegium of the Talmudic passages relating to Yeshu, the same scribe copied an entire text of 'the story of Yeshu son of Pandera, the Nazarene, may the name of the wicked rot' (מעשה בישו בן פנדרה הנצרי שר"י).⁵⁵ This text is a pastiche of several different strands of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts: It begins with the story of Yeshu as a young boy, and how the Sages

⁵³ Here and below, # + number refers the manuscript's number at the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the National Library of Israel.

⁵⁴ The *Toledot Yeshu* text was edited by Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:25–26, 66–70). For a detailed discussion of this text, see Benarroch (2020). I am grateful to Jonatan Benarroch and Miriam Goldstein for sharing with me their forthcoming study on the frequent appearance of *Toledot Yeshu* in Yemenite manuscripts of *Midrash ha-Gadol*.

⁵⁵ See Fisch (1972, 274–76).

discovered that he was conceived when his mother was menstruant and fornicating. It then relates how Yeshu stole the Ineffable Name from the Temple and performed miracles with it. Next comes the story of how Yeshu flew in the air and R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah (and not Yehudah the gardener!) flew after him, soiled him with semen (so as to make it impossible for him to use the Ineffable Name), and brought him down. We then turn to scenes that are well attested in our own text, beginning with the trial and execution of Yeshu’s six (!) disciples (5.5–5.9a), which is followed by the story of how Yeshu and Yoḥanan were brought before Tiberinus, and how Yeshu made Tiberinus’ daughter pregnant (6.1–6.8, 6.10–6.14).⁵⁶ Heb5 then narrates how Yoḥanan was executed (7.1), but omits the scenes in which Yeshu flies in the air (7.2–7.7), either because these already were incorporated—in a very different version—earlier in this text, or because they were missing from the text that this redactor had in front of him, just as they are missing from Heb1 and from Heb2/Heb3. Like them, Heb5 moves directly to the scene where Yeshu is executed (7.8), and to the fate of his body (8.1–8.7, 8.9–8.10). The text then turns to the cursing formulae and the colophon (9.4–9.5).

As this summary makes clear, Heb5 is a mixed text: Much of it is unrelated to our text (and often parallels texts from the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*), but some of it—and especially in its later parts—does parallel our text. Moreover, in those parts

⁵⁶ Heb5 omits 6.9, either because the story of a three days’ fast appeared earlier in its narrative, and in a different context, or because it was missing from the text that this redactor had in front of him, just as it is missing from Heb1 and from Heb2/Heb3, and cf. our comments ad loc.

the parallels can be quite close to the other textual witnesses—close enough to be printed synoptically, as we shall do below.

There is no doubt that these parts of Heb5 were translated from Aramaic, as they sometimes retain the Aramaic words of the original.⁵⁷ However, they often display some verbal similarities with the text of Heb1 (this is especially visible in 6.5–6.13), and it is therefore quite likely that Heb1 and Heb5 represent two different reworkings of the same translation from Aramaic into Hebrew. But the text of Heb5 also displays several long interpolations, which are not found in the other textual witnesses, and are likely to be later additions (see esp. 5.9a, 8.6, 8.10, 9.4).

Biblical verses are cited in Hebrew.

Spelling of personal names: ישו x 28, עיסא x 1; פליטוס x 2, פליטס x 1, פליטס x 1.⁵⁸

II.1.14. Hebrew 6 (Heb6)—Tel Aviv, Gross Family Collection 67, Fols 44a–46b

Paper; a Yemenite manuscript, copied in 1689, containing different prayers and supplications, followed, on fols 44a–46b, by ‘the story of Yeschu son of Pandera, the Nazarene, may the name of the wicked rot’ (מעשה בישו <בן> פנדרה הנצרי שר’).⁵⁹ The text is

⁵⁷ Aramaic words: E.g., בני אלהא דשמיא in 6.5; ובזע למעה דבת מלכא in 6.12; דימותון בהון in 6.14; ומן קדם דתלן יתיה פקיד in 8.1.

⁵⁸ These numbers are based on the entire text of Heb5, and not just the parts that parallel our text.

⁵⁹ This manuscript was mentioned by Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:65), who rightly noted the text’s almost complete identity with that of Heb5.

virtually identical with Heb5, and probably was copied directly from it, as may be seen from a few mistakes and omissions in this copy. It breaks off in the middle of 8.10, so one folio probably is missing. However, as the text of Heb6 is almost identical with that of Heb5, it will not be included in the synopses below, and its rare variant readings will only be noted in footnotes to Heb5.

Summing up our survey of the direct textual witnesses, we may note that they include the Aramaic fragments, which cover about two thirds of the complete text (see Appendix 1), at least two different translations from Aramaic into Judaeo–Arabic, only one of which is fully preserved, and at least three different translations from Aramaic into Hebrew, two of which are fully preserved. And in those cases where we can see which texts were copied side-by-side with our text, no clear pattern emerges from our findings. If Ar3 and JA3 indeed came from the same manuscript, that manuscript must have contained our text in both its Aramaic and its Judaeo–Arabic versions.⁶⁰ Heb5 was copied on the margins of *Midrash ha-Gadol*, as a supplement to the stories about Yeshu found in the *Midrash* itself. However, when it comes to Ar1, JA1, Heb2, Heb3 and Heb6, the manuscripts in which our text was copied seem to have been miscellanies with *halakhic*, liturgical, and other short texts, as well as the text about Yeshu. Unfortunately, this tells us very little about the *Sitz im Leben* of our text in the Jewish community of medieval Cairo or in the other Jewish communities in which it was copied and read. But

⁶⁰ For a similar occurrence, see, for example, the Genizah fragment Cambridge, T-S NS 309.51, where a short Aramaic divinatory text is immediately followed by its Judaeo–Arabic version.

what we can say with some certainty is that the recurrent acts of copying and translation of our text are a sign of its popularity in late antiquity and the Middle Ages; they also are the cause of the many discrepancies between the textual witnesses whenever they overlap. We shall return to the latter issue below, but must first examine the indirect witnesses to our text.

II.2. Indirect Textual Witnesses

In addition to the direct textual witnesses, which present copies of the ‘Pilate’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu* in three different languages and in varying states of textual preservation, our text is also attested in several indirect textual witnesses—that is, in texts that cite, paraphrase or summarise our text, or that incorporate small parts thereof into new textual conglomerations. Some of these are Aramaic or Hebrew texts, but two indirect textual witnesses are written in Latin, two in Arabic, and one in Spanish.

Before turning to the texts themselves, a note of caution is in order. As we shall see throughout the present study, some of the motifs found in our text are also attested in other Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. However, when a single motif from our text appears in another text, this does not necessarily demonstrate that text’s familiarity with our text. In some cases, the motif is well known from other sources as well; for example, the claims that Jesus was the son of Pandera, that he was a magician, or that he was buried in a garden, or in a water-source, are far from unique to our text, as we shall note below, in our comments on 3.2, 2.1, 7.8, 8.4 and 8.12, respectively. In other instances, a certain motif is unique to our

text, and to texts that depend upon it, but familiarity with this motif alone does not suffice to prove familiarity with our text. For example, the claim that Jesus was a *mamzer*, with the different meanings assigned to that term, clearly was wide-spread in late antiquity, and its appearance in this or that text does not demonstrate a dependence on our own text (see below, our comments on 3.1).⁶¹ It is only when we find a text with a conjunction of several motifs that are unique to our text that we may assume that text's familiarity with our text, and thus use it as an indirect textual witness. These witnesses may be listed as follows:

II.2.1. Harkavy-A—St. Petersburg, RNL Evr II A 105/9

This fragment was first published by Harkavy and was discussed by Horbury and re-published by Meerson and Schäfer.⁶² It is a paper (?) bifolium, made up of non-consecutive folios, containing two different texts.⁶³ It is written in an Oriental hand of the eleventh century, perhaps pointing to Tyre as its place of origin. Both texts are written in late Aramaic, and both are fully vocalised (Tiberian vocalisation). One text offers a typological exegesis of

⁶¹ For another example, see our discussion of a medieval addition to *Sefer Yosippon*, in our comments on 1.3.

⁶² Harkavy 1875; Horbury 1971, 124–27; Meerson and Schäfer 2014, II: 39, 63–64.

⁶³ As I only had access to microfilm images of this fragment, I could determine neither the material nor the size of this fragment. After my book went to press, I realised that the first text on this fragment bears a striking resemblance to the Genizah fragment Jerusalem, NLI Heb. 577.6.5.

an unidentified text (1 Kgs 7?), equating thirty obscure entities with the thirty prophets, fourteen gold horns (קִרְנֵי־זָהָב) with fourteen biblical matriarchs, and four gold objects that grow out of the fourteen horns (וְאַרְבַּעָא קִלְנִתֵּי־זָהָב דְּנִפְקִין מִן אַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרָה) with Daniel and his three friends who were thrown into the fiery furnace and into the lions' den (see Dan. 3.19–27 and 6.17–22). The second text is based in part on our text, or on one of its sources, but in a version that is very different from that of all the direct textual witnesses. The first three extant words are ‘mud, as before’ (טִינָא בְּדִקְמִיתָא), i.e., the end of the story of how Yeshu fashioned birds from clay, made them fly, and then dissolved them back into the clay of which they were made (and cf. below, 0.13). Next, Yeshu tells his disciples that he is the Messiah, son of David. Rav Yehudah then hits him on his head and says “wicked man son of a wicked man, what have you said?” (רְשִׁיעָא בְּרִי רְשִׁיעָא מָא אָמַרְתָּ), to which Yeshu responds, “I did not say thus; I said, ‘May the Messiah son of David come quickly’” (לֹא אָמַרְתִּי כֵן אֲנָא אָמַרְתָּ יְיָ [תִּי] מְשִׁיחָא בְּרִי דְדִיד בְּעֻגְלָא). Yeshu then goes to King Caesar (no other name is provided), asks the king to give him his daughter, and promises him that he will say words over her and she will become pregnant and give birth to a boy. King Caesar gives Yeshu his daughter, Yeshu says words over her and makes her pregnant, but when she does not give birth on time, Yeshu opens up her belly and brings out a boy. King Caesar asks Yeshu what he wants in return, and Yeshu says that his only request is that the king will kill all the Jews in his kingdom. The Jews then declare a fast and beg God to save them, and God indeed has mercy on them—but the text breaks off here.

The story about the king's daughter shows many parallels with the story found in our text, but also differs from it in many details (see our synopses and comments on 6.6–6.11). But all the other scenes in Harkavy-A are not found in any of the other textual witnesses of our text, even if they share some points of contact with it, including the appellation 'wicked' (רשיעא) applied to Yeshu (see below, our comments on 6.1), and the role of a Rav Yehudah (the gardener?) as one of the protagonists.

II.2.2. Harkavy-B—Kiev, Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, OPI 806

This fragment was first identified among Harkavy's materials in Kiev by Sacha Stern in 2013, and was recently published by Willem Smelik.⁶⁴ It is a paper folio, 17.2 x 24.5 cm, with 30 lines of text, and is written in a Byzantine hand of the fifteenth/sixteenth century.⁶⁵ It is titled תרגום המתקדשים ירושלמי, "Targum Yerushalmi of "Those who sanctify themselves"" (i.e., Isaiah 66.17), but the title was added by a later hand. The text itself parallels Harkavy-A, but is longer, and begins with Rabbi Yeshoshu'a recounting the story of Yeshu's birth, after the carpenter Bandira slept with Miriam, who was married to Yoseph, while she was menstruant.

⁶⁴ Smelik (2025). I am grateful to Willem Smelik for sharing with me this important paper prior to its publication.

⁶⁵ I have seen neither the fragment itself nor an image thereof, and both my description and my transcription are entirely based on Smelik's article mentioned in the previous note.

It then narrates how Yeshu was circumcised, including a description of the polluted food served at the circumcision-feast that finds close parallels in *Eikha Rabbati* and in the writings of the ninth-century Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, in a story attributed to the seventh-century Abū Hurayra.⁶⁶ We subsequently learn how Yeshu, who grew up in Tiberias, saw the Ineffable Name on the walls of the Temple, and began using it, including for making birds that can fly. From this point on the narrative parallels that of Harkavy-A, and preserves a slightly better version of the story of Yeshu's dealings with King Caesar. After it turns out that the foetus in the maiden's belly is a stone, King Caesar hands Yeshu over to the Jews. Yeshu then tells his disciples that he is going up to his father in Heaven, and hides himself for three days in R. Yehudah's garden, after which the text breaks off.

Like Harkavy-A, this text too presents some materials that were borrowed from our text, which we shall quote in the appropriate sections below, and some scenes that were derived from other copies of *Toledot Yeshu*. Moreover, the spelling 'Bandira' for Yeshu's real father, and the parallel in al-Tirmidhī's work, probably point to an Arabic influence on this text.

⁶⁶ See *Eikha Rabbati* 1 (Buber 1899, 47–48), and Abū 'Abdallah Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Bashir al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-'usul fī ma'rifat āḥādīth al-rasūl*, section 258; for a French translation, see Hayek (2001, 186).

II.2.3. Shemtov Ibn Shaprut

In an attempt to prove that the Jews too acknowledge the miracles of Jesus, the Jewish convert to Christianity, Abner of Burgos, also known as Alfonso of Valladolid (on whom more below), cited two different *Toledot Yeshu* texts in which such miracles were described. And in an attempt to refute Abner/Alfonso's claims, Shemtov Ibn Shaprut, the Iberian Jewish writer of the second half of the fourteenth century, re-cited both passages in his polemical anti-Christian tractate *Even Boḥan*.⁶⁷ From these citations, we learn that one text used by Abner/Alfonso was called *מַעֲשֵׂה שֶׁל יֵשׁוּ הַנּוֹצָרִי*, 'The Story of Yeshu the Nazarene', in which the action took place at the time of Queen Helena. The other text was written in *לְשׁוֹן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם*, 'the language of the Yerushalmi' (that is, in Aramaic, and maybe even in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic), was called *עוֹבְדָא דִישׁוֹ בֶּר פְּנֵדְרָא*, 'The Story of Yeshu, son of Pandera', and in that text the action took place at the time of Tiberinus Caesar. Ibn Shaprut next records Abner/Alfonso's paraphrastic and abridged citations of passages from both texts, which were cited in their original languages. The paraphrases of the Aramaic text cover a part of the story about how Yeshu made Tiberinus' daughter pregnant (see below, 6.3–6.7), and immediately move to the story of how Yeshu tried to avoid crucifixion by flying in the air and hiding in the cave of Elijah, but was caught by R. Yehudah the gardener (see below, 7.2–7.7).

⁶⁷ See Krauss (1902, 146–47); Horbury (1971, 113–21, 476–78); Meerson and Schäfer (2014, I:12–14).

As the passages which Abner/Alfonso and Ibn Shaprut paraphrase are extant in Ar1, and in some instances also in Ar2 or Ar3, it is easy to see that the Aramaic text behind this paraphrase was essentially similar to the other Aramaic texts at our disposal, but that Abner/Alfonso, or an earlier extractor, abridged the text he was citing. In two cases, he seems to have misunderstood the text in front of him (see our comments on 7.6 and 7.7). In others, his paraphrase shows the impact of the language and phraseology of the Babylonian Talmud and of Targum Onqelos (see our comments on 6.5, 6.6, and 7.2).⁶⁸ However, his text is close enough to the Aramaic texts to serve as a useful textual witness for the passages it covers, and one would have loved to see more such citations from the copy of our text that was available to Abner/Alfonso in the fourteenth century (and we shall return to this issue below, when we look at his own works).

Unfortunately, there is no complete critical edition of Ibn Shaprut's *Even Boḥan*.⁶⁹ Krauss edited the relevant passages from a manuscript in Breslau which is no longer extant, but the work is found in numerous other manuscripts.⁷⁰ Of these, I have used the MS Florence, Plut. 2.17 (Sephardic hand, sixteenth-century; IMHM #17662), fols 190r-v, while referring in the footnotes to better readings found in the Genizah fragment Cambridge, T-S K 17.5 (Italian hand, fourteenth-century? IMHM #18964), whose

⁶⁸ Note, however, that some of these elements may be the work of later scribes, as may be seen in our comments on Ibn Shaprut's text in 7.4.

⁶⁹ See Garshowitz (1974); Niclós (1997).

⁷⁰ For the manuscripts, see Garshowitz (1974, xxxv-lvii).

text often is inferior to that of the Florence manuscript, but sometimes preserves better readings.⁷¹

II.2.4. Agobard of Lyons

Agobard, the bishop of Lyons from 816 to 840, wrote several letters concerning the Jews, their behaviour, and their beliefs.⁷² The longest of these, *On the Superstitions and Errors of the Jews* (*De Iudaicis superstitionibus et erroribus*), was written in 827 CE, and was addressed to King Louis the Pious.⁷³ In it, Agobard provides a detailed account of earlier Christian writers' insistence on the need to shun the Jews and avoid social contacts with them. He also includes a list of the Jews' superstitions, errors and blasphemies, explaining that 'This is well known to us, since we speak

⁷¹ T-S K 17.5 (which is only identified as 'Polemics' in the Friedberg Genizah website) contains two complete bifolia, whose folios are numbered 133–36; the colophon at the end of fol. 136v identifies the author and the text: בריך דיהב חילא לעבדיה בר אמתיה המחבר הה"ר שם טוב ו' שאפרוט: 'נ"ע, ובכאן נשלם השער הט"ו בסתירת דעת מאישטרי אלפונשו בריך דיהב חילא לעבדיה בר אמתיה המחבר הה"ר שם טוב ו' שאפרוט, the great rabbi, Rabbi Shem Tov ibn Shaprut (may he rest in Eden), and here ends the fifteenth section of (or, dealing with) the refutation of Maestro Alfonso'. The citations from the Aramaic text of *Toledot Yeshu* are found on fol. 133r.

⁷² The texts were edited by van Acker (1981, 185–221), and are also available in Rubellin (2016). For Agobard's anti-Jewish writings, see Blumenkranz (1963, 152–68); Bonfil (1994); Langenwalter (2009).

⁷³ The letter was in fact written by Agobard, Bernard of Vienna, and Faof of Chalon-sur-Saône. For the last two, see Rubellin (2016, 312–33). For ease of reference, I shall refer to Agobard as the author of this letter, and cf. Langenwalter (2009, 145–46).

with them almost on a daily basis, and have heard their mysterious errors' (*Quod nobis non minime notum est, qui cotidie pene cum eis loquentes, mysteria erroris ipsorum audimus*).⁷⁴ He then describes the Jews' belief in a corporeal God, in the existence of the Torah even before the creation of the world, in seven earths, seven Hells, and seven Heavens, and so on, before moving to their blasphemies against Jesus. Here, he explicitly states that the Jews 'read (*legunt*) in the teachings of their ancestors' a whole set of nasty claims about Jesus (see below, our comments on 3.8). He ends his account by stating that 'All these things were indeed fabricated by their elders, and they themselves rehearse them with stupid obstinance' (*Haec autem omnia ideo seniores eorum confinxerunt, et ipsi stulta obstinatione lectitant*), in order to subvert the power of Christ's Passion.⁷⁵

Most of the claims about Jesus that Agobard cites are attested in our text (see below, our comments on 2.1, 3.8, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 7.8, 8.2 and 8.4), and it is therefore evident that the Jews of Lyons had some written form thereof, and that some Jews—or Jewish converts to Christianity—even recited some of its stories to the local Christian bishop.⁷⁶ However, Agobard also attributes to the Jews several claims that are not found in our text: For example, he says that they claim that,

⁷⁴ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 9 (van Acker 1981, 205). For Agobard's familiarity with our text, see also the detailed discussion by Schäfer (2011).

⁷⁵ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 207).

⁷⁶ See Langenwaller (2009, 172–73).

Jesus... had many disciples, to one of whom he gave the name Kephas, that is 'stone', because of his thick and sluggish mind (*Iesum... plures habuisse discipulos, quorum uni propter duritiam et hebitudinem sensus, Kephae, id est petre, nomen inposuerit*).⁷⁷

Our text mentions Kepha (see below, 4.2 and 5.1), but does not even hint at the etymology of his name, which may reflect a different branch of the textual transmission, and may have been added by the Jews who spoke to Agobard from their own oral traditions.⁷⁸ Agobard also attributes to his Jewish interlocutors the claim that,

When the people were expecting him (i.e., Jesus) on a festive day, some children from his school ran before him, and out of respect and reverence for their teacher sang 'Hosanna to the Son of David (*Et cum expectaretur a populo ad diem festum, quosdam ei de scola sua pueros occurrisse, qui illi ex honore et reverentia magistri cantaverint, Osanna filio David*).⁷⁹

This scene is not found in our text, and stands in marked contrast with its potent polemics against Yeshu. Moreover, it is clearly based on Matt. 21.15, and one wonders whether the Jews of Lyons would have known this passage, and would have agreed with the claim that Jesus indeed was a descendant of King David.

⁷⁷ van Acker 1981, 206; Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10.

⁷⁸ Below, we shall see that Abner/Alfonso knew of a text which was supposedly sent from Rabbi Simon Kepha to Rabbi Nathan de-Tzutzita. Thus, it is possible that some versions of our text had more to say about Simon Kepha than the extant textual witnesses.

⁷⁹ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 207).

Agobard also records another scene that is not found in our text, when he relates what happened after Jesus was buried near an aqueduct and entrusted to someone called Iuda to guard (see below, 8.4). He then adds:

But in the night he was carried away by a sudden inundation of the aqueduct (*noctu vero subita aquaeductus inundatione sublatum*); he was sought after for twelve months, by Pilate's order, but was still not found (*Pilati iussu per duodecim lunas quaesitum, nec usque inventum*).⁸⁰

This claim partly parallels some of the known versions of our text (see below, our comments on 8.4). But Agobard's subsequent passage is again very different from our text:

Pilate then promulgated a law for them, in this way (*Tunc Pilatum huiusmodi ad eos promulgasse legem*): "It is clear," he said, "that he who was killed by you because of your jealousy rose from the dead, as he had promised, and that he is found neither in his grave nor in any other place (*Manifestum est, inquit, surrexisse illum, sicut promiserat, qui et a vobis per invidiam peremptus est, et neque in tumulto neque in ullo alio invenitur loco*). And for this reason, I command that you worship him; for whoever shall refuse to do so, should know that his share will be in Hell (*Et ob hanc causam praecipio, ut adoretis eum. Quod qui facere noluerit, partem suam in inferno futuram esse cognoscat*)."⁸¹

This scene is unattested in the extant textual witnesses of our text, and is again at odds with the rest of our narrative, which makes it clear that Pilate saw Yeshu's dead body and therefore knew

⁸⁰ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206–7).

⁸¹ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 207).

that he did not ascend to Heaven (see below, 8.10 and 9.3). And Agobard also says that the Jews claim that Peter was not released from prison by an angel (as in Acts 12.7), but by King Herod himself, and this surely is unrelated to our text.⁸² Thus, either the Jews of Lyons had in front of them a text that differed from ours in some very important details, or they told Agobard tales that were taken from our text as well as from other texts, or—and this is the likeliest scenario—Agobard himself added some details of his own to the stories he had heard from the Jews.⁸³ But be this as it may, the fact that in many places the stories narrated by Agobard are paralleled in our text—and are not found in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*—demonstrates that by the ninth century our text was well known to the Jews of Lyons. Whether they knew it in an Aramaic version, or in a Hebrew translation, is an open question.

II.2.5. Amulo of Lyons

Amulo succeeded Agobard as the bishop of Lyons, a position he held from 841 to 852 CE. Following in his predecessor's footsteps, and utterly shocked by the conversion to Judaism of the Deacon Bodo in 838 CE, Amulo wrote in 846 CE a long tractate on *The*

⁸² Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 207).

⁸³ For example, the claim that Pilate promulgated a pro-Christian decree fits well with the many Christian depictions of Pilate as a crypto-Christian believer, and cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.24: 'Pilate, who himself was by his own consciousness a Christian' (*Pilatus, et ipse iam pro sua conscientia Christianus*), and the Christian *Acta Pilati* literature, with Dusenbury (2021).

Perfidy of the Jews (De perfidia Iudaeorum).⁸⁴ As he explicitly says, he received much of his knowledge about the Jews and their beliefs from Jewish converts to Christianity, and many of the beliefs and claims that he attributes to Jews indeed are attested in Jewish texts.⁸⁵ He devotes much space to the Jews' belief in two Messiahs—a Messiah son of David and a Messiah son of Ephraim—but he also pays some attention to the nasty things that the Jews say about Jesus. Extracting the Jewish claims from his excruciatingly convoluted refutations is not always easy, but there is no doubt that some of these claims are based on his informants' familiarity

⁸⁴ For a recent edition, a detailed introduction, and a German translation, see Herbers-Rauhut (2017). For Amulo's reference to his predecessor (Agobard, whose name is not explicitly mentioned), see *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 43 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 86); for Bodo's conversion see *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 42 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 84–86), and for the date of composition of Amulo's own work see *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 19 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 36); also cf. Blumenkranz (1963, 195–200).

⁸⁵ See Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 42 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 84): 'We received from some persons, who went over from their error to Christianity, and who also explained to us in an accurate manner their other evils, that... We clearly saw ourselves how they regularly ambush in a wicked and crafty manner those who convert from their perfidies, have faith, and are baptised, and say to them...' (*Proditum est nobis a quibusdam, qui ex eorum errore ad Christianitatem veniunt, per quos etiam cetera eorum mala nobis fideliter exponuntur, quod... Nos ipsi veraciter experti sumus, quod illis qui ex eorum perfidia conversi credunt et baptizantur, ita malitiose et callide soleant insidiari, ut dicant...*). For the second part of this citation, see also below, our comments on 8.9. For the cultural identity of the Jews whom Amulo met, see Lapin (2023).

with at least one version of our text.⁸⁶ As we shall note in greater detail in our comments on specific passages, he clearly knew several key elements of our narrative (see below, **3.3**, **6.1**, **7.8**, **8.3**, **8.9**, and cf. **8.10** and **8.12**). However, he also knew of anti-Christian Jewish stories and traditions that are not found in our text, including nasty names given to the Apostles and the Gospels (one of which, *Avon Gilayon*, is already attested in rabbinic literature),⁸⁷ the claim that the Jews call Jesus ‘*Ussum Hamizri*, which means the Egyptian destroyer’ (*dissipator Aegyptius*),⁸⁸ and the claim that Jesus’ tomb remains empty in Amulo’s own day, and is filled by the Jews with stones and filth.⁸⁹ And he also makes the puzzling claim that the Jews forbid the recitation of Psalm 19 (i.e., Psalm 20 in the Hebrew Bible) in all their synagogues, since it has obvious references to Jesus.⁹⁰ Some of these claims may have come from a version of our text that is quite different from that attested in the direct textual witnesses, but they are more likely to have stemmed from other sources, and especially from

⁸⁶ For Amulo as an important witness to *Toledot Yeshu*, see the detailed analysis by Horbury (1971, 438–66), and cf. Schäfer (2011). The discussion by Herbers-Rauhut (2017, lxxxix–xcviii), makes no use of the more recent scholarship on *Toledot Yeshu*, and is therefore quite dated.

⁸⁷ See Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 10 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 16) and bt Shab 116a, with Horbury (1971, 443–44).

⁸⁸ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 39 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 76), and see below, our comments on **3.1**.

⁸⁹ For this claim, see below, our comments on **8.9** and **8.12**.

⁹⁰ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 10 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 18). For the use of Psalm 20 in Jewish liturgy, see Elbogen (1993, 71).

the oral traditions that the Jewish converts to Christianity related to their new patron. And yet, Amulo's references to the Jews' anti-Christian claims provide further evidence that our text was well known to the Jews of Lyons in the first half of the ninth century.

II.2.6. Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ

In his *Reply to the Christians* (*Al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā*) the ninth-century polymath al-Jāḥiẓ (776–869 CE) records claims made by the Jews concerning Jesus.⁹¹ Embedded in a long refutation of the Christian claims that the Qur'an's reports about Jesus and about Christian and Jewish beliefs are full of errors, al-Jāḥiẓ says that the Jews reject the stories about the miracles of Jesus.⁹² He then adds that,

Sometimes they laugh (at these stories), and sometimes they become angry and say that he was a master of spells and magic rituals, a healer of demoniacs, a quack, a master of tricks, and a trainer of deceptions and the reading of books; and he was eloquent but silent, and he was killed

⁹¹ The importance of these references was noted by Horbury (1971, 209–11). The text of *Al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā* was discovered and edited by Finkel (1926, 9–38); cf. his discussion, and partial English translation (but not of the section that interests us here) in Finkel (1927). For an introduction to this text, and a French translation, see Allouche (1939). For a more detailed analysis, and an English translation, see Fletcher (2002). The following translations of the Arabic text are my own.

⁹² For a recent suggestion that the Qur'anic statements about Jesus echo—and refute—stories found in the 'Pilate' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, see Anthony (2025) and Zellentin (2025). However, the possible echoes of our text in the Qur'an do not suffice to consider it an indirect textual witness to our text.

and stoned. And he had previously been a fisherman, and an owner of nets, and so were his followers.⁹³

Al-Jāḥiẓ also says that ‘The best speakers, and the most moderate in their religion among them (i.e., among the Jews) claim that he was the son of Joseph the carpenter’.⁹⁴ And he states that the Jews claim that Jesus’ healing of the paralytic was based on a collusion between the healer and his patient, and that Jesus did not raise Lazarus from the dead, but only brought him back to consciousness, after touching him and realising that he had a pulse.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, al-Jāḥiẓ does not explain which Jews he was talking to, and where he had met them, but both in his hometown Basra and in Baghdad, where he was active as a scholar, he would have met many learned Jews. The stories that they told him clearly were not based exclusively on our text, but as we shall note below, in our comments on **2.1**, **3.5**, and **8.2**, some of these stories are directly dependent on our text; in other instances, the parallels are more general, and see our comments on **0.8** and **3.6**.

II.2.7. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Qayyim al-Jawziyya

This fourteenth-century writer (1292–1350) has several interesting references to Jewish claims about Jesus, embedded in his

⁹³ See Finkel (1926, 23), with Allouche (1939, 140) and Fletcher (2002, 77).

⁹⁴ See Finkel (1926, 23), with Allouche (1939, 140) and Fletcher (2002, 77).

⁹⁵ See Finkel (1926, 23), with Allouche (1939, 140) and Fletcher (2002, 78).

lengthy treatise, *The Guidance for the Perplexed in Answering the Jews and Christians* (*Kitāb hidāyat al-ḥayārā fī ajwibat al-yahūd wal-naṣārā*).⁹⁶ Some of these claims are based on the Talmudic stories about Yeshu, including the story (found in *bt San* 107b and *Sota* 47a and cited below, in our comments on 0.12) of why Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah excommunicated Yeshu.⁹⁷ But other stories are clearly based on the *Toledot Yeshu* texts. As a case in point, we may note his claim that,

Some Jews say that he (i.e., Jesus) was one of them, and that they know his father and his mother, but they attribute to him (birth by) adultery... and they call his adulterer father al-Bandir, the Roman, and they call his mother Miriam, the hairdresser (الماسطة), and they assert that her husband—Joseph, son of Judah—found al-Bandira with her on her bed, or sensed it (i.e., her fornication), and he abandoned her and denied her son.⁹⁸

Some of these claims could have been derived from rabbinic literature (including the claim that Jesus’ mother was Miriam the hairdresser, for which see especially *bt Shab* 104b), and some are

⁹⁶ For what follows, see Cuffel (2020, 149–53). For Ibn Qayyim and his polemics, see Hoover (2010) and Schlosser (2013). For Ibn Qayyim’s familiarity with Jewish sources, see Goldziher (1873; reprinted in Goldziher 1967, 229–58). In what follows, I use the Arabic text of Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996) and the English translation by El-Masri (1428/2007).

⁹⁷ See Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996, 531–32) and El-Masri (1428/2007, 298).

⁹⁸ Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996, 531); El-Masri (1428/2007, 297–98). Cf. Anthony (2025, 179, n. 93), for the appearance of these claims in the writings of Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Abī ‘Abidah al-Khazrajī (1125–1186).

found in our text, but the full story of how Joseph caught his wife in bed with Pandera is only attested in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*. The same is true of Ibn Qayyim’s version of the flight story, where he states that the Jews claim that Jesus did not perform any miracles, except one, when ‘he flew in the air, when they were about to seize him, and one of them flew after him, ascended above him in his flight, and he (i.e., Jesus) fell down to earth’.⁹⁹ Here too, there is nothing that would point to the specific version of this story that is found in our text, rather than the ‘Helena’ recension (see below, 7.2–7.7). And in some instances, Ibn Qayyim cites stories that are found in the ‘Helena’ recension but not in our text, including the story of how Yeshu and his friends were playing ball, and when the ball fell near a group of sages (مشايخ), Yeshu went to bring it, and the sages recognised him as a bastard (زنيمة).¹⁰⁰ Even Ibn Qayyim’s claim that all this happened in the time of Qaysar Batariush (قيصر بتاريوش), i.e., Tiberius Caesar, need not be based on our text, since it is also found in some of the versions of the ‘Helena’ recension, and is in any case attested also in Luke 3.1, a Gospel that Ibn Qayyim frequently cites.¹⁰¹ Thus, while Ibn Qayyim certainly had some access to a *Toledot Yeshu* text, that text probably was a part of the ‘Helena’ recension.

Besides al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah there are several other Muslim writers who seem to have been familiar

⁹⁹ See Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996, 529) and El-Masri (1428/2007, 296).

¹⁰⁰ See Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996, 532) and El-Masri (1428/2007, 298).

¹⁰¹ See Al-Ḥājj (1416/1996, 532) and El-Masri (1428/2007, 298).

with stories taken from *Toledot Yeshu*, but as far as I can see, they were all acquainted with some form or another of the ‘Helena’ recension, and not with our text. This may reflect a greater popularity of the ‘Helena’ texts in the Islamic world, but the existence of three different Judaeo–Arabic copies of our text in the Cairo Genizah, based on at least two different translations of the Aramaic text, would argue against such an hypothesis. Alternatively, it might simply be a lacuna in modern research, waiting to be filled by a competent scholar.

II.2.8. Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid

This Jewish rabbi, who converted to Christianity ca. 1320, wrote several polemical treatises against his former co-religionists.¹⁰² The first of these, *Sefer Milḥamot Adonai*, ‘The Book of the Wars of the Lord’, is unfortunately mostly lost: Both the original Hebrew text and the Castilian translation are lost, and only some excerpts in Latin are extant, as well as the Hebrew citations by Shemtov Ibn Shaprut, which we discussed above.¹⁰³ However, Abner/Alfonso returned to the nasty Jewish stories about Jesus in his later book, the *Moreh Tzedek*, ‘Teacher of Righteousness’, whose original Hebrew version is lost, but whose Castilian translation, the *Mostrador de justicia*, is extant.¹⁰⁴ In this work, he again refers to the existence of different versions of a Jewish text called

¹⁰² For Alfonso’s references to *Toledot Yeshu*, see Vicioso (1992); Szpiech (2021).

¹⁰³ For these excerpts, see del Valle Rodríguez (1992).

¹⁰⁴ For a critical edition of the Castilian text, see Mettmann (1994–1996).

‘The Story of Jesus of Nazareth’ (*del fecho de Jhesu Nazarenno*),¹⁰⁵ and says that some Jews claim that he lived in the time of Queen Helena, and others say it was in the time of Tiberius. Of the latter, Abner/Alfonso adds,

They say that Emperor Tiberius ordered him to be killed at the request of the Jews, and because his daughter died after the conception that Jesus brought about without the help of a man. (*Dizen que Tiberio Çesar le mandó matar al pedimento de los judios, e porque murió su ffijo de Tiberio con el concibimiento quel ffizo Jhesu sin ayuntamiento de uaron*).

And he immediately adds that,

It says so in the book written in Aramaic about “The Story of Jesus, Son of Pandera” that Rabbi Simon Kepha sent to Rabbi Nathan Retzutzita in Babylonia, in the time of Herod (*Assi lo dize en el libro que es conpuesto en lengua caldea del fecho de Jhesu, fijo de Pandera, que enbió Rrabi Ssimon Quefa a Rrabi Natan Rressucita a Babilonia, e esto fue en tienpo de Erodes*).¹⁰⁶

Above, we already saw that Ibn Shaprut cited Abner/Alfonso’s paraphrase of the story of how Yeshu made Tiberinus’ daughter pregnant; here, we see that Abner/Alfonso also knew the end of the story, in which Tiberinus’ daughter dies, and Tiberinus decides to punish Yeshu for this crime (see below, **6.12–6.14**). However, here we also learn that the book was composed in Aramaic (*lengua caldea*), rather than the more specific ‘the language

¹⁰⁵ The Castilian ‘fecho’ probably translates the Aramaic ‘*uvda*’, as in Ibn Shaprut’s text.

¹⁰⁶ For the text, see Mettmann (1994–1996, II:136–37). I have used the translation by Szpiech (2021, 285).

of the Yerushalmi', and that in the manuscript known to Abner/Alfonso, it was presented as a text (a report?) sent by Simon Kepha (from Palestine) to Rabbi Nathan Retzutzita (i.e., de-Tzutzita) in Babylonia. Rabbi Nathan de-Tzutzita probably lived at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century, so it is not clear how Simon Kepha, who lived in the first century, could have sent him this text.¹⁰⁷ However, the chronological mismatch probably was not due to Abner/Alfonso, but to the texts in front of him, since some *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts claim that Simon Kepha composed a prayer-book and sent it to Rabbi Nathan de-Tzutzita who is described in these manuscripts as the head of the Jewish community in Babylonia.¹⁰⁸ All these manuscripts belong to the 'Helena' recension, are written in Hebrew, and attribute to Simon Kepha the composition of a prayer-book, and not the composition of *Toledot Yeshu* itself, and so it is not clear what exactly was the text that Abner/Alfonso had in front of him. One possibility is that he was mixing up motifs taken from different recensions of *Toledot Yeshu*; another is that he had in front of him a hybrid text, which already contained such a mixture.

¹⁰⁷ For גתן (ד) צוציטא, see bt Shab 56b.

¹⁰⁸ This claim appears in the manuscripts classified by Meerson and Schäfer as Late Yemenite A (Meerson and Schäfer 2014, II:124). For the positive role assigned to Simon Kepha (i.e., Peter) in some of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts, see van Bekkum (2003a), and for the *piyyutim* attributed to him, see van Bekkum (2003b).

Abner/Alfonso refers to this text once again, when he notes that,

In the “Passion of Jesus, Son of Pandera,” which Rabbi Simon Kepha sent to the Sages and to Rabbi Natan Retzutzita in Babylonia, it is proven that Jesus of Nazareth and Saint John the Baptist lived in the time of Emperor Tiberius, which was the time of Herod (*En la “Passion de Jhesu ben Pandera,” que enbió Rrabi Ssimon Quefa a los ssabios e a Rrabi Natam Rresucita a Babilonia, se prueua que Jhesu Nazareno e Ssant Johan Baptista fueron en tiempo de Tiberio Çesar, que ffue en tiempo de Eroles*).¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, in this case the title of this work is given as the ‘Passion’ of Yeshu, and one wonders whether this is an attempt to translate into Castilian an Aramaic title such as *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, which probably was the original title of our text (as we shall see below). And the claim that Jesus and John the Baptist were contemporaneous, and lived in the time of Tiberius, certainly is borne out by our text, though our text never mentions King Herod (except in the late-Byzantine interpolation, in **0.1**), and one would have expected a reference to Pilate instead.

A third reference to our text is much shorter. There, Abner/Alfonso says that the Jews possess texts that attest to Jesus’ miracles, and mentions both the ‘Helena’ text and

The other book, which they composed in the language of Jerusalem on “The Deed of Jesus, Son of Pandera,” which says that he lived in the time of Tiberius Caesar (*E assi el*

¹⁰⁹ See Mettmann (1994–1996, II:199); Szpiech (2021, 286).

otro libro que conpusieron en lengua de Jherusalem de “Ffa-zienda de Jhesu, ffijo de Pandera,” e que dize que ffue en tienpo de Tiberio Çesar).

He then goes on to cite the stories of how Jesus used the Ineffable Name to perform his miracles, stories that are found in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, but not in our own text. However, in this passage we come closest to the passages cited by Ibn Shaprut, since here we learn that the Aramaic text was written ‘in the language of Jerusalem’, and that both texts confirm the veracity of the miracles of Jesus, which is exactly what we find in the passages cited in the *Even Boḥan*.

Alfonso de Valladolid is the last Christian writer who had direct access to our text, and perhaps also the last person in the world who is known to have read it in Aramaic. Interestingly, after one of his references to our text, he turns to the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, of which he says that it is ‘more widespread among the Jews’ (*más publicado entre los judios*).¹¹⁰ This fits well with our other textual data, which shows that by the fourteenth c. the ‘Pilate’ recension was on the wane, and that the ‘Helena’ recension gradually became much more popular. In fact, the ‘Pilate’ recension was still available, but only in a Hebrew version, to Israel son of Yequtiel, who copied it in 1536 CE (see above, Heb1), and a similar version—or a part thereof—was still available to Ḥayim ben Shalom al-Ḥajaj, who copied it in 1653 (see above, Heb5), and whose text was copied as Heb6 in 1789. In all three cases, we are dealing with provincial centres of Jewish learning, namely Byzantium and Yemen. In the major centres

¹¹⁰ See Mettmann (1994–1996, II:199); Szpiech (2021, 286).

of Jewish learning, the 'Helena' texts were widely read, were translated into new languages, such as Yiddish, and were known to and translated by Christian Hebraists such as Ebendorfer and Wagenseil. But by this time the 'Pilate' recension was entirely forgotten, until it was brought back to life by modern scholars.

II.2.9. The Other Recensions of *Toledot Yeshu* as Indirect Textual Witnesses

As noted above, *Toledot Yeshu* circulated in many different versions. There is little doubt that the Aramaic 'Pilate' recension was the earliest *Toledot Yeshu* text, and that the later versions borrowed heavily from this recension, while adding many new subplots, scenes and narrative details that are not found in our text. It is therefore hardly surprising that both the 'Helena' and the 'Herod' texts display numerous elements that are also found in the 'Pilate' recension, including the names of some of the protagonists, the places where the action takes place, and some of the specific scenes and narrative details, including the claim that Yeshu was a *mamzer*, the flying contest, the crucifixion on a cabbage stalk, and so on. In light of such parallels, it is clear that the later *Toledot Yeshu* texts can serve as indirect textual witnesses to our text, but in most cases such parallels are of little value for its textual reconstruction. After all, by stating that when a certain narrative element is found both in our text and in other recensions of *Toledot Yeshu* we may assume the priority of our text, we are also saying that when reading a later text we can tell which elements are ultimately derived from our text only because they

are already attested in it. Thus, their value for filling the lacunae in our text is a priori quite limited.

There are, however, some exceptions, in those cases where our text is corrupt or uncertain, and where other versions of *Toledot Yeshu* seem to reflect those details in our text for which the direct textual witnesses do not supply a secure reading. One example is found at the very beginning of our text (1.1), which is not extant in the Aramaic fragments, but seems to be preserved in slightly garbled Aramaic in the Hebrew of Heb1. A very similar Aramaic phrase is preserved in some late manuscripts of the ‘Helena’ recension at the end of the text, and it is very clear that it is not based on Heb1, but on the incipit, or the colophon, of a lost Aramaic textual witness (see our comments on 1.1). Another example is found in 8.12, where we learn that after dragging Yeshu’s body through the streets of Tiberias, Yehudah the gardener buried it בברזיא דמיא (Ar3)/ בברזיא דמיא (Ar4), ‘in the water-holes’ (?). The corrupt word lurking here cannot be reconstructed with certainty, but it seems to recur in late Hebrew manuscripts of the ‘Helena’ recension, where we are told that after being dragged in public, Yeshu’s body was buried in a place called פריזתא or פריזתה, which probably is yet another version of location mentioned in our own text (and see our comments on 8.12).

III. The Relations between the Textual

Witnesses, and the Question of an Urtext

As we already noted, whereas the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu* is attested in numerous manuscripts and in several different

languages, and displays major differences between its many textual witnesses, the ‘Pilate’ recension is attested in only three languages, and in a relatively small number of textual witnesses. There are two reasons for the paucity of the textual evidence: On the one hand, we have no Jewish manuscripts from late antiquity, or, to be more precise, we have very few Jewish manuscripts from the period between the first century CE, when the latest Dead Sea Scrolls were written, to the eighth or ninth century CE, which is when the oldest Genizah fragments were written. Thus, from the period when our text was first written down (on which, more below), and for several more centuries, we can hardly expect to find any manuscript evidence of its existence. On the other hand, the ‘Pilate’ recension seems to have enjoyed some popularity between the ninth and the fourteenth century, but was much less popular, and mostly forgotten, in later periods. This fact is due, no doubt, to the growing popularity of the ‘Helena’ recension, which was probably composed—by someone who clearly had at least one version of the ‘Pilate’ recension in front of him—in the ninth or tenth century.¹¹¹ That recension was first written either in Judaeo-Arabic or in Hebrew, and enjoyed an ever-growing popularity, in both these languages as well as in Yiddish, Ladino, and Judaeo-Persian, not to mention its Latin versions, produced by Christian polemicists. The ‘Pilate’ recension was eventually left with very few readers, and even fewer copyists.

¹¹¹ See Goldstein (2021a, 18–19).

The result of this process is that when we edit the direct textual witnesses of the 'Pilate' recension synoptically, as we shall do below, the differences between all the textual witnesses are relatively small. However, these differences suffice to show that the translators and copyists of our text did not hesitate to delete some parts, add others, and modify the text in many different ways. Thus, the textual witnesses of the 'Pilate' recension should be examined from two different perspectives. On the one hand, we should analyse each textual witness on its own and highlight its treatment of our text; this is something that we did, albeit briefly, in our introduction to each textual witness, and that we shall highlight in greater detail in our comments on every passage of our text. But on the other hand, the question must be raised whether we can use the textual witnesses at our disposal to reconstruct the original version of our text; or, to make things even more difficult, should we assume that such an Urtext ever existed?

Any analysis of such issues must begin with the Aramaic texts at our disposal, since there is no doubt that the text was first written in Aramaic, and that the Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew texts are based on translations from Aramaic source-texts. Ideally, we would have had access to several complete copies of the Aramaic text, in order to see how much they resemble each other, where they diverge, and whether we can securely establish the original reading whenever they diverge. This, however, is not the case, since we do not have even one complete Aramaic copy of our text, and all of our Aramaic fragments combined only cover about two thirds of the text, which is fully preserved in only one Judaeo-

Arabic version (JA1) and in two Hebrew ones (Heb1 and Heb3). And yet, the evidence we do have allows for some conclusions about the relationships between the different Aramaic copies whose fragments have reached us, and between the Aramaic texts and the Judaeo-Arabic and the Hebrew ones.

As we shall see on numerous occasions below, whenever two or more of the Aramaic textual witnesses overlap, and/or whenever we can compare the Aramaic text(s) with their Hebrew or Judaeo-Arabic translations, we see four distinct types of textual differences. Let us take a closer look at each of these differences.

III.1. Scribal Errors

One common feature of any textual transmission by way of handwritten copies is the presence of scribal errors. Above, in our description of each of the Aramaic textual witnesses, we noted some of the obvious errors and corruptions found in each manuscript. However, there are many other instances of textual corruption that are not so readily apparent. Note, for example, how in **8.9**, in the account of how Yehudah the gardener dug Yeshu's body out of his temporary grave, Ar1 has *ואסקיה*, 'and he brought him up', and Ar4 uses the same verb, *ואסקיה*, but Ar3 has *ואפיק יתיה*, 'and he took him out'. Both *אסק* and *אפק* would fit here, but the graphic similarity between them is so great that we would be safe in assuming that one reading is more original, and the other is based on a slight miscopying thereof. In this case, the reading of JA1, *פנבשה*, 'and he dug him out', is not very helpful, but Heb1's reading, *והוציא*, 'and he took (him) out' shows that the Aramaic text which it translated had the reading *אפק*, and the fact that in

9.1 several textual witnesses support the reading אַפֿק shows that this must have been the original reading. Moreover, in this case it is quite possible that the change to אַסֿק was due in part to a scribe's familiarity with the Talmudic story of how Onqelos raised Yeshu (אַסֿקִיָּה לִישׁוֹ) from the dead in order to ask him about his fate (bt Gitt 57a).

Another minor modification that is visible in the different textual witnesses is reflected in the interchanges between the claims that Yeshu and Yoḥanan misled 'the (Jewish) people' and the claim that they misled 'the world'. This interchange is due to a small variation in the Aramaic, between עַמָּא and עַלְמָא; but the difference is not merely due to a scribal error. As we shall note in our comments on **1.1**, in rabbinic literature כָּל עַמָּא is a typical Palestinian way of referring to the Jewish people, whereas Babylonian rabbinic texts, and those that depend upon them, often refer to כּוּלִי עַלְמָא instead.

III.2. Minor Modifications and Rephrasing of the Text

Whenever we can read a passage of our text in two or more Aramaic textual witnesses, we see many small differences between them. These involve the addition or deletion of a word or two, the substitution of one word by another, or the re-arranging of the words in a sentence, but in ways that do not really change the meaning of the text, and only express the same meaning in different words. Examples of such minor scribal modifications are found throughout our text, and a typical example is found in **6.1**, the first passage for which we have three different Aramaic textual witnesses. In this passage, Ar1 says that Pilate 'answered',

but Ar3, and perhaps Ar5 as well, say that he ‘answered and said’; this reading is also reflected in JA2.¹¹² In the same passage, Ar1 speaks of ‘Yeshu the wicked’, which reading is also reflected in JA2 and some of the Hebrew versions, but Ar3 and Ar5 merely speak of ‘Yeshu’. And still in the same passage, in Ar1 Pilate speaks of the disciples of Yeshu who ‘misled the world’ (or, ‘the people’, ܡܠ[ܝ]ܢ) whereas Ar3 and Ar5 have Pilate speaking of the disciples, but then saying that Yeshu and Yoḥanan ‘misled the people’; this latter reading is also reflected in Heb5. In all these cases, it would be quite impossible to show that one reading is original and the others are later modifications; but in a way this makes very little difference, since the meaning of the text remains quite the same regardless of which reading we choose to follow.

To see an example of a much greater difference between two Aramaic textual witnesses, we only need to turn to the next passage, 6.2. Here, we find Ar5 explaining in a few words that the Jews ‘answered and said to him (i.e., Pilate): “If our master [wi]shes, we shall send to [Tibe]rinus Caesar.” And they sent and informed him’. However, Ar1 has a much longer text, explaining that,

R. Yehoshu‘a answered and said to Pilatus: “If our master wishes, we shall send and inform [Tibe]rinus Caesar and whatever he shall tell us, we shall do.” They sent to him: “There are seven men here, who misled the whole world and such is their business”—everything they had been doing.

¹¹² Note that in 6.2 we again find ‘they answered’ in Ar1, whereas Ar3 and Ar5 have ‘they answered and said’. But elsewhere Ar1 too uses the ‘answered and said’ formula, and see, for example, 6.5 and 6.6.

Looking at the other textual witnesses for this passage, we can see that JA1 has a text that is even shorter than that of Ar5; JA2's text closely follows the longer text of Ar1; Heb1 has a short text; and the other Hebrew versions go their own ways, but probably reflect the longer version of this passage. In this case, it would again be difficult to tell whether a shorter text came first, and was later embellished with more details, or maybe the longer text was abridged by a later copyist, although the former possibility seems more likely (see our comments on 6.2). Nor is there clear evidence that some of the Aramaic texts are consistently longer, or shorter, than the others. In 6.5, Ar3 is badly preserved, but its text seems to have been much shorter than that of Ar1. In 7.3, Ar2's text is longer than Ar1's, and in 8.3, Ar2 and Ar4 present a text that is longer than that of Ar1. But in 8.5, the text of Ar1 and Ar4 is longer than that of Ar2, in 8.6 the text of Ar4, and probably of Ar2 as well, is longer than that of Ar1, in 8.7 the texts of Ar1 and Ar4 are longer than that of Ar3, and the same is true in 8.9. In 8.8, the entire passage is found in Ar3, but omitted in Ar1 and Ar4. Thus, it does not seem as if some of the text's editors or copyists tried to abridge or expand the text in a systematic manner. Rather, in each passage, each editor and copyist felt free to abridge or expand the text in front of him. And what is absolutely clear is that such processes were in full force already when the texts were copied in Aramaic, and—perhaps more importantly—that such modifications make only minor differences to the structure and contents of the text as a whole.

III.3. Dialectical Modifications

A third type of differences between the Aramaic textual witnesses reflects the editors' or copyists' preferences for different dialectical forms, in line with either the Aramaic they spoke, the Aramaic with which they were most familiar from texts they were reading (and especially the Babylonian Talmud and the Targumim), or the Aramaic that they considered more 'authentic' or more appropriate for such a text. As an example of such differences, let us look at two Aramaic textual witnesses for 7.1:

- Ar1 [בההיא ש]עְתָּא טעינו יְתָהּ[ון ב]פרזלא ואובילו יתהון לטבריה ואתקינן ליוחנן
[אילנא¹¹³ ו]צִלְבו יתיה בחמָ[יש ש]עי מן יומא ובתר כן קברו יְתִיה
- Ar2 ...טענונן בפרזלא ואובלנן לטיבריה ונסבו ליוח[נ] מִצְבֵּעֲנָא וצלבוניה חמש
שעי מן יומָא ובתר כן קברוניה

In four different places, Ar1 uses the accusative marker -ית with a pronominal suffix (x 2 יתהון and x 2 יתיה), and in all four places, Ar2 prefers an accusative suffix ending (x 2 ין- and x 2 יה-), that are typical of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. Moreover, in all these instances, Ar1 has 3pl.m. verbs ending with י, whereas Ar2 adds a final *nun*, a typical feature of Targumic Aramaic and of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.¹¹⁴ This is not an isolated example, but a recurrent phenomenon. One can see more examples in 7.2, where

¹¹³ This reconstruction is based on the text in Heb2 and Heb3 and in Heb4 (and cf. Heb1), but צליבא also is possible.

¹¹⁴ See Smelik (2009, 13, 15 and 35), and Sokoloff (2011, 16–17). Both scholars note the presence of typical Jewish Palestinian Aramaic forms in Ar2, a fact already noted by Ginzberg (1928, 328). And cf. Boyarin's analysis of the Aramaic of Ar3 as consisting both of Eastern and of Western Jewish Aramaic features (Boyarin 1978).

Ar1 has למצלביה ... לאצל[בא י]תי[ה]... למיצלב יתיה and Ar2 has ... למצלביה ... ד <י> סקון יתיה... דאטעי יתהון in 8.1, where for Ar1's דאטעי יתהון ... דאטעינן in 8.2, 8.4 and 8.5. Moreover, such dialectical differences are apparent not just in Ar1 and Ar2, which happen to be the best preserved Aramaic textual witnesses, but also in the other textual witnesses. Note, for example, how in 8.1 and 8.2 Ar4 parallels Ar1 and differs from Ar2, but in 8.5 Ar1 has אשכחוהי, Ar2 has אשכחוניה, and Ar4 has אשכחו יתיה.

Many more such examples could be adduced, but the important point is that none of the Aramaic textual witnesses displays a 'pure' Aramaic dialect, nor does any witness display a systematic attempt to revise the text in line with a single dialect. In fact, all of them seem to mix forms that stem from different types of Jewish Aramaic, and are internally inconsistent even in the spelling of the same word in different passages.¹¹⁵ This could mean that the text was written down at a time when Aramaic was no longer a living language, but it could also mean that it was copied by scribes who no longer knew Aramaic well, and who corrupted and 'corrected' the text. Each copyist would thus add more and more such changes to the text in front of him, in line

¹¹⁵ Note, for example, that Ar1 uses both תלתא and תלתה in 6.9, and has ואובלינן in 6.3, but ואובילו יתהון in 7.1, has וצלבו יתיה in 7.1 and 8.2, but וצלבוהי in 7.8, and has קברו יתיה in 7.1 (and קבר יתיה in 8.12), but קברוהי in 8.4; Ar2 has פומא דמערתא in 7.5 and פומה דמערתא in 7.6, צלבוניה in 7.1, but צלבוה in 7.8, קברוניה in 7.1, but קברוהי in 8.4; Ar3 has תלמידיה in 4.5, תלמידוהי in 4.6, and תלמידיו in 6.1 and 9.2; Ar4 has משכחיתון in 8.1, but אשכחתון in 8.7, סלקית in 8.1, but סליקת in 8.7.

with what he thought was the ‘right’ way of writing older Aramaic texts. We shall return to this issue below, in section V.

III.4. Deliberate Editorial Changes: Theologically and/or Ideologically Motivated

So far, we have focused on textual differences that are due to scribal errors, to different formulations of the same basic content, and/or to modifications due to the many different forms of Jewish Aramaic in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. However, in some instances the Aramaic texts display differences that change *the contents* of the text they transmit. One clear example of such a difference is found in 7.6, where Ar2 has Yehudah reciting the Ineffable Name in order to open the cave’s mouth, but Ar1 has him utter a more elaborate spell, namely, ‘Opening, opening, open up! For I am [the me]ssenger of the Great God’. Such a difference surely is not due to scribal errors, or to a minor rephrasing of the same contents, but to a deliberate modification. And as we shall note in our comments on this passage, in this case it seems more likely that Ar1 preserves an earlier version of the text, which was replaced by a theologically safer formulation in Ar2. Another example is found in 7.7, where Ar1 says that Yeshu turned himself into a rooster bird, but Ar2 merely refers to a bird; a more significant change is seen in Ar1, which refers to the Carmel mountain as the place to which Yeshu escaped, but Ar2 names no specific location. In this case, it is not impossible that the words דתרנולא ואזל ויתיב בטורא דכרמלא were omitted from the text due to a scribal error, but it is more likely that what we see here is a deliberate change. However, as we shall note in our comments ad loc., in

this case it is not clear whether the reference to Mt Carmel was added to the original text in order to echo a biblical verse, or whether it was deleted from the original text because later copyists were unaware of the existence of a Mt Carmel near Tiberias.

III.5. The Question of an Urtext

To sum up this discussion, we may note that even when we ignore the modifications and revisions of our text in its Hebrew and Judaeo–Arabic versions, and focus only on its Aramaic textual witnesses, we must still reckon with many differences between these textual witnesses. It is therefore quite clear that if we had several fully-preserved Aramaic copies of our text there would have been many differences between them. It is also clear that the differences between the different Aramaic copies of our text are due not only to textual corruptions, but also to editorial activity. This hardly is surprising, since our text never became a canonical text but did enjoy quite some popularity, at least from the time it was written until the fourteenth century. Moreover, such minor differences between the textual witnesses are apparent even in canonical Jewish texts of late antiquity, including much of rabbinic literature.

But where does all this leave us in our search for an Urtext? Here, it is important to distinguish between two different issues, namely, the search for the *earliest recoverable text*, and the search for the *original text*.¹¹⁶ As for the former, the available textual witnesses do not enable a full reconstruction of an Aramaic text, nor do they allow a reconstruction of an English translation—based

¹¹⁶ For this distinction, see Hayman (2007).

on the Aramaic, Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew texts—that would be completely reliable. However, having noted the many differences between the different textual witnesses, we may now note that most of these differences have to do with the wording of individual passages, but not with the order of these passages or with the overall structure of the text. Thus, I would argue that although we cannot offer a hypothetical reconstruction of an Aramaic text, we can at least offer a tentative English translation, in which some passages are more textually secure than others, and in which the emphasis is more on the overall contents of each passage, and less on its exact wording (see Appendix 2).¹¹⁷

However, this hypothetical reconstruction of the earliest recoverable text probably is not identical with the original text. As we shall note below, in our comments on 5.4, the scene in which Yeshu's five disciples are brought to trial is attested in all the textual witnesses (except those that are broken at this point), but this scene probably was not a part of our text at an earlier stage, and was taken from a rabbinic source. Incorporating this scene also necessitated adding some explanation as to why, if Yeshu had eleven (or twelve) disciples (as stated in 4.5), only five of them were brought to trial; this helps explain the strange account in 5.2 of how some of his disciples escaped. If this indeed is what happened, then the earliest text we may reconstruct from the textual witnesses at our disposal represents a text that has already

¹¹⁷ And cf. Hayman (2004, 1–15, 43–48). However, whereas the textual witnesses of *Sefer Yetzira* are all written in Hebrew, and are mostly well preserved, those of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* are written in three different languages and often are poorly preserved.

undergone at least one major modification.¹¹⁸ It is therefore quite likely to have undergone other modifications as well, to which we currently have no access. In some cases, and most clearly in our comments on **6.9**, we shall raise the possibility that a certain passage in one of the Aramaic textual witnesses in fact is a later addition to, or an extensive modification of, an earlier version of the Aramaic text.¹¹⁹

A further complication is raised by the fact that some textual units found in our text probably circulated orally long before they were committed to writing. As we shall see below, the claims that Jesus' father was called Pandera, and that Jesus was a magician, were well known to Celsus, writing in the 170s CE (see our comments on **3.2** and **2.1**, respectively), and the same may be true of the claim that he had eleven disciples (see our comments on **4.5**). The claim that Jesus was crucified, or buried, in a garden, goes back to the Gospel of John, and is well attested in early Patristic literature (see our comments on **1.3** and **7.8**). Moreover, the curses against the followers of Yeshu (**9.2**, and cf. **9.4**) probably circulated in many different forms at least from the second century CE, as demonstrated by the references to such curses by Justin Martyr and other early Christian writers (see our comments on **9.2**). Thus, there is no doubt that long before our text was written down, Jews must have heard, and told, many stories

¹¹⁸ This modification also entailed adding a reference to seven culprits in **6.2**, as seen in Ar1 and JA2, and see our comments *ad loc.*

¹¹⁹ And cf. our comments on **6.14**, for the possibility that the entire scene with Tiberinus' daughter was not there in some early versions of our text.

about Yeshu, and that some of these stories were later incorporated into our text. And as we shall note below, the story of Yeshu's crucifixion on a cabbage stalk may have developed from a small modification of an earlier version of the story, that only spoke of crucifixion in a cabbage garden (see our comments on 7.8). Thus, we should always keep in mind that the earliest recoverable text is not the earliest version of our text, and that the earlier versions unfortunately are inaccessible to us.

However, we should also keep in mind that the text as we now have it is not a haphazard collection of oral stories about Yeshu, but a relatively well-structured text, clearly focused on a single theme, namely, the trial and execution of Yeshu. And if we are right in assuming that it was written in an attempt to present a semblance of the 'authentic' records of the trial of Yeshu—as we shall argue in the following section—it also means that it was composed by someone who tried to make the text look as 'authentic' as possible. Thus, we should not discard the idea that *Gzar dina de-Yeshu* had an Urtext, but always bear in mind that this Urtext was not identical with the text that we can reconstruct from the extant textual witnesses.

IV. The Contents, Structure, Title and Genre of the 'Pilate' Recension of *Toledot Yeshu*

IV.1. The Contents of the 'Pilate' Recension

Apart from the long interpolation at the beginning of Heb1, which is probably based on a late-Byzantine text of the 'Helena'

recension of *Toledot Yeshu* and was not a part of the original composition, our text may easily be divided into nine textual units. It begins with an opening unit (1) that sets the stage for what follows by providing the relevant details, such as the time and place where the events take place and the persons involved. This is followed by seven scenes, which are distinguished by the identity of the main actors, and by the main actions, in each scene. In the first of these scenes (2) Pilatus the governor questions Yehudah the gardener about Yeshu, and has Yeshu brought to him. In the next scene (3) Pilatus interrogates Yeshu about his identity and about his actions, and since Yeshu claims that Yoḥanan had taught him his magic, in the next scene (4) it is Yoḥanan who is brought before Pilatus and interrogated. The following scene (5) focusses on Yeshu's disciples, who are caught, interrogated, and executed. The focus then (6) shifts from Pilatus to Tiberinus Caesar, to whom Yeshu and Yoḥanan are brought, and who wants them to make his daughter pregnant without a man. When this miracle ends in a miserable failure, Tiberinus sends Yeshu and Yoḥanan to be tried according to the Torah. We then learn (7) how Yoḥanan was crucified, and how Yeshu tried to escape but was caught, and then he too was crucified. In the next scene (8), we learn that Yeshu's followers were convinced that he ascended to Heaven, and to refute their claims his body was exhumed, dragged through the streets of Tiberias, and eventually re-buried. The text ends with a concluding unit (9), which provides specific information about the dates of the different events, a list of witnesses to these events, and some curses against Yeshu's followers and blessings for those who follow God (or, for the Jews).

IV.2. The Original Title of the ‘Pilate’ Recension

When it comes to the question of the text’s original title, things become slightly more complicated. *Toledot Yeshu* is notorious for the many different titles attached to its textual witnesses over the years.¹²⁰ However, for the ‘Pilate’ recension, which is the focus of the present study, there is much less discrepancy between the textual witnesses. The best attested title is *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, ‘The Sentencing (or, Judgment) of Yeshu’, a title that is implied in Heb1 (which probably preserves the original incipit of the Aramaic text from which it was translated), and is reflected in the incipits of Heb2/Heb3 and Heb4, and in the colophon of JA1 (see below, our comments on 1.1). This title is also attested in a manuscript with the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, whose colophon says, *זה ספר גזר דין דישו בן פנדירא מצאתי בקובץ ישן*, ‘This is the Book of the Sentencing of Yeshu son of Pandera, which I found in an ancient compilation’.¹²¹ And, as we noted above, it may also have been known to Abner/Alfonso of Valladolid, who referred to the ‘Passion of Jesus, Son of Pandera’. However, in addition to *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, our text also received several other titles, the best attested being *מעשה ישו*, ‘The Story of Yeshu’ (Ar1 and Heb5 in 9.5), which may go back to an Aramaic title like *עובדא דישו בר פנדירא*, as recorded by Ibn Shaprut. Two other titles, *מגלת ישו*, ‘The Scroll of Yeshu’ (see Heb4 in 1.1), and *[כת]אב יש[ו]*, ‘[The bo]ok of Yes[hu]’ (JA1 in 1.1), are attested only once, and probably do not go back to the earliest version(s) of our text.

¹²⁰ See Di Segni (1985, 41–42), and Horbury (2020).

¹²¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 712 (#20523), fol. 157r.

IV.3. The Genre of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*

The question of the text's original title is closely connected with that of its postulated genre. In the past, scholars have been accustomed to treat *Toledot Yeshu* either as a polemical parody, intent on making fun of Jesus and his followers by telling fanciful stories about them; as a counter-history, aiming to refute specific claims made in the Gospels by telling stories that undermine these very claims; or as folk narratives, intended to amuse and instruct their readers or hearers.¹²² All these generic classifications may apply to the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, in its many different forms. However, unlike that recension—which displays a great interest in Yeshu's birth, his trial and execution, and in the fate of some of his earliest followers, and which often displays its familiarity with the Christian Gospels—our text is only interested in the trials and executions of Yoḥanan, (of Yeshu's five disciples),¹²³ and of Yeshu himself. Moreover, our text makes some effort to look like an official document, by providing the exact time and place where the proceedings took place (see 1.2, 1.3, and 9.1), and especially by providing a list of witnesses who were present when Yeshu was executed and when his body

¹²² For *Toledot Yeshu* as a parody, see, for example, Goldstein (2023). For *Toledot Yeshu* as a counter-history, see Funkenstein (1993, 39–40), and Biale (1999). For *Toledot Yeshu* as a folk-narrative, see Yassif (2011).

¹²³ As we noted above, and as will be discussed in our comments on 5.4, this scene—which indeed may be read as a parody—probably is a later addition to *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*.

was dragged through the streets of Tiberias, and who thus vouchsafe for the text's (supposed) authenticity (see 9.3). Thus, the title גזר דינא דישו, 'The Sentencing of Yeshu', may be seen as yet one more aspect of our text's attempt to look like the 'authentic' protocols of the trial and execution of Yeshu and his closest associates.

In order to fully understand this attempt, we must briefly turn to other 'authentic' protocols of the trial of Jesus, since the production of such protocols seems to have captured the imagination of quite a few ancient authors. While many stories about Jesus circulated from his lifetime onwards, and while the earliest Christian communities were busy producing many *evangelia*, that is, stories about the 'good news' of Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, the first known attempts to produce 'authentic' protocols of his trial come from the early fourth century.¹²⁴ As Eusebius informs us, during the last great persecution of the Christians, in the reign of Maximinus Daia (310–313 CE), the authorities 'forged protocols of Pilate and our Saviour (Πιλάτου καὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ὑπομνήματα), full of every kind of blasphemy against Christ', and,

¹²⁴ To be sure, earlier Christian writers already claimed that such protocols existed (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 35.9 and 48.3; cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.2 and 21.24 and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2), but such claims are extremely doubtful. For the following discussion, see especially Lampe (1984); Dubois (1991); Chambert-Protat and Gerzaguët (2019, 173–98).

Sent them round to every part of his (i.e., Maximinus') dominions,¹²⁵ with edicts that they should be exhibited openly for everyone to see in every place, both town and country, and that the primary teachers should give them to the children, instead of lessons, for study and committal to memory (Διὰ προγραμμάτων παρακελευόμενοι κατὰ πάντα τόπον, ἀγρούς τε καὶ πόλεις, ἐν ἐκφανεῖ ταῦτα τοῖς πᾶσιν ἐκθεῖναι, τοῖς τε παισὶ τοὺς γραμματοδιδασκάλους ἀντὶ μαθημάτων ταῦτα μελετᾶν καὶ διὰ μνήμης κατέχειν παραδιδόναι).¹²⁶

Eusebius mentions these forged anti-Christian *hypomnēmata* of Pilate and Jesus three times in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and a fourth reference is found in Rufinus' translation of that work.¹²⁷ We shall examine some of the specific details below (in our comments on 1.2, 3.8, and 8.0), but should already note that, unfortunately, Eusebius says very little about the actual contents of these forged protocols, which presumably were written in Greek. And, to the best of my knowledge, we have neither epigraphic nor papyrological attestations of these documents, which must have enjoyed a limited circulation, and for a very short time, and were destroyed by the triumphant Christians of the later fourth century.

While the 'authentic' Roman protocols of the trial of Jesus remain mostly inaccessible to us, the 'authentic' Christian protocols, known as the *Acta Pilati*, or the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, enjoyed

¹²⁵ Which included mainly Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.

¹²⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 9.5.1 (LCL translation, with minor modifications). For the significance of Eusebius' reference to these *hypomnēmata*, see Horbury (1971, 387–95) and Dusenbury (2021, ch. 4). For the wider historical context, see Mitchell (1988).

¹²⁷ See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.9.3, 1.11.9 and 9.6.3.

a wide circulation in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹²⁸ The earliest of these texts probably was written in Greek, probably in the fourth century, and it was subsequently translated into numerous languages, including Latin (and all of Europe's vernacular languages), Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Coptic, and many other languages. The texts found in these versions diverge widely, but many of the textual witnesses have one or two prologues, one of which purports to be the first-person account of the converted Jew, Ananias, who explains how he found the protocols (ὕπομνήματα) of the trial of Jesus, written in Hebrew (ἐν ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν) and translated them into Greek (γράμμασιν ἑλληνικοῖς).¹²⁹ The second prologue provides a detailed dating formula for the court proceedings (see below, our comments on 1.2), which is followed by the scribe identifying himself as Nicodemus, who wrote his account in Hebrew.¹³⁰ The account itself begins with the Jewish leaders coming to Pilate and accusing Jesus of saying that he is the son of God and a king, profaning the Sabbath, and wishing to abolish the Torah. The text then turns to a series of successive scenes, in each of which more and more persons, and even inanimate objects, recognise or demonstrate Jesus' divinity, or innocence, thus confounding the Jewish claims.

¹²⁸ For a recent survey, see Baudoin (2023, esp. 435–55). For an earlier survey, see Izydorczyk and Dubois (1997).

¹²⁹ I cite the Greek text of Version A, from Tischendorf (1853, 203).

¹³⁰ Tischendorf (1853, 204–6); for a detailed analysis of these passages, and the suggestion that the dating formula is a part of the text's original title, see Furrer and Guignard (2013).

There are many differences between the *Acta Pilati* and *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, not least because the *Acta* depend heavily on the Gospels, whereas *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* seems quite oblivious of the Christian Gospels and develops its own narrative scenes.¹³¹ But they share in common an emphasis on the exact date on which the proceedings took place (see below, 1.2 and 9.1), and—more surprisingly—a set of curses and blessings uttered by the Jews at the very end of the text (see our comments on 9.2 and 9.4).

The Roman, Christian, and Jewish attempts to present the ‘authentic’ protocols of the trial of Jesus as a part of their anti- and pro-Christian polemics were in no way a novelty. Long before the fourth century, ‘authentic’ protocols of different trials were compiled and distributed by the supporters of different social factions. The most famous examples are the numerous Christian martyrs’ acts, that sometimes take the form of the supposed protocols of the trial during which a Christian (or a group of Christians) was condemned to death.¹³² To these we may add the so-called ‘Acts of the Pagan (or Alexandrian) Martyrs’, which are Greek texts that were found among the papyri from Roman Egypt. These texts purport to record the proceedings of trials of

¹³¹ There are, however, some points of contact between the two texts, and especially the emphasis on the Galilee as the location of Jesus’ activity. In the *Acta Pilati*, the risen Jesus preaches to his followers on Mount Mamilch (Tischendorf 1853, 242, 246, 259), a mountain not far from Tiberias; see Reiner (1998, 263–67).

¹³² Much has been written about this literary genre, and see the useful survey by Praet (2020), and the detailed study by Rebillard (2021).

Alexandrian patriots who were tried and executed by several Roman emperors.¹³³ Both types of ‘acts’ are literary texts, and the degree to which they tried to emulate authentic Roman court proceedings—in order to enhance the verisimilitude of their accounts—varies greatly from one text to another. *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* differs from these martyrs’ acts in that it is written from the perspective of the executioners, not that of their victims, but it too seems to have adopted several features intended to make it look like the authentic protocol of a real trial.¹³⁴ These may be listed as follows:¹³⁵

A) By far the most conspicuous feature of our text is its recurrent use of the formula (יֵן) וְאָמַר (יֵן), ‘He/they answered

¹³³ See Musurillo (1954); Harker (2008); Vega Navarrete (2017).

¹³⁴ For the protocols that recorded Roman court proceedings (most commonly called ὑπομνήματα or ὑπομνηματισμοί and best preserved in papyri from Roman Egypt), see Coles (1966) and Palme (2014), and cf. Bekken (2015, 71–90).

¹³⁵ For the following discussion, cf. Rebillard, “To qualify as written in the protocol form a text must be composed primarily of a dialogue between a judge and the accused Christians, that is, one or more interrogation scenes, with an introductory formula and a concluding section” (2021, 22). Note also his claim, that this format became common in Christian martyrs’ *Acta* only from the fourth century, and that “later martyr texts included one or more interrogation scenes in the protocol style, but within a larger narrative frame” (2021, 26).

and said', followed by direct speech.¹³⁶ Such formulae are already attested in the canonical biblical texts, and are also found in the Aramaic Targumim of late antiquity.¹³⁷ However, this way of reporting a legal encounter also is the most common feature of written Roman court proceedings, and one of the common features of texts that try to imitate them. In Greek legal protocols from Roman Egypt, the words of the different persons involved in the trial are usually given in direct speech, and there are several different manners of introducing their words, one of which is εἶπεν, 'he said'.¹³⁸ The same phenomenon is well attested in the *Acta Pilati*, where one repeatedly reads how 'Pilate says' (λέγει ὁ Πιλάτος) + direct speech... 'the Jews say' (λέγουσιν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) + direct speech... 'Pilate says to them' (λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Πιλάτος) + direct speech... 'they say to him' (λέγουσιν αὐτῷ) + direct speech.¹³⁹ In a few cases, we even find there the formula 'they answer and say' (ἀποκριθέντες... λέγουσιν), or 'they answered and said'

¹³⁶ See 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.1, 6.1, 6.2, etc. Even in passages where no Aramaic text has been preserved, one can see that it used this formula; note, for example, how at the beginning of 4.1, Heb4 has ויאמר ...השיב, and Heb2/Heb3 have ויאמר ...ענה, reflecting two different translations of the מתיב ... of the Aramaic text in front of them.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Song 2.10 and the numerous examples of ...יען in the Hebrew Bible, and cf. Daniel 2.5 (ענה... ויאמר) and Daniel 2.7 (ענו... ויאמר), and Targum Sheni to Esther 1.1 (David 1898, 1) (מתיבין... ויאמר), and many other examples.

¹³⁸ For the use of *oratio recta* in Roman protocols of trials, as attested in many papyri from Egypt, see Coles (1966, 9–27); for the formulae with εἶπεν, see Coles (1966, 41–46), and cf. Palme (2014, 485–86, 496).

¹³⁹ See, for example, Tischendorf (1853, 207–8).

(ἀπεκρίθησαν... καὶ εἶπαν), which is an exact parallel to what we find in our own text.¹⁴⁰

B) Another common feature of Greek protocols from Roman Egypt is the importance of the introductory formulae, which often include the date and place of the trial, and the names of the persons involved, both as litigants and as presiding judges.¹⁴¹ In the *Acta Pilati*, we already mentioned the presence of a long dating formula at the very beginning of the text, and in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, the text begins by introducing the culprit (see below, 1.1), and then provides the date, the place, and the name of the presiding judge (1.2), after which we are given the specific date on which the proceedings began to unfold (1.3). Later on in the narrative we learn the exact dates of Yeshu's crucifixion and of the dragging of his body through the streets of Tiberias (9.1). Such precision was not really necessitated by the narrative itself, and only the fact that Yeshu was crucified on the fourteenth of Nisan was pre-determined by the Christian stories about Jesus (and see our comments on 9.1). Thus, providing specific dates for these events probably was intended to give our text a more 'official' look.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Tischendorf (1853, 215, 218 and 259); the use of this formula certainly was influenced by its appearance in New Testament passages, such as Mark 7.28 (ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ), Luke 13.15 (ἀπεκρίθη... καὶ εἶπεν), John 1.30 (ἀπεκρίθη... καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ), and numerous other examples, especially in the Gospel of John. And it is also frequently found in the *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, in sections that supposedly record the exact words spoken by Jacob and his Jewish interlocutors (see Bonwetsch 1910, 42–43 and Déroche 1991, 136–37).

¹⁴¹ See Coles (1966, 29–38).

C) Pilate's interrogation of Yeshu begins with a set of questions about his origins, his parents, his name, and his profession (3.1–3.5). Tiberinus' interrogation of Yeshu and Yoḥanan begins by asking for their names and their activities (6.4). Such questions are common whenever one meets a stranger, but are also typical at the start of a criminal interrogation. Note, for example, how when the Christian Conon is brought before the governor (ἡγεμῶν, just as in our text) of Pamphylia, he is asked 'Where are you from? Of what descent are you? What is your name?'¹⁴² And when a group of Christians is brought forth before another Roman ruler, he asks them about their names, where they are from, and what are their religious beliefs.¹⁴³ Similarly, in a Coptic martyrdom, a Christian named Stephanos is brought before Arianos the governor (again, ἡγεμῶν), who asks him what is his name, where he is from, and what does he do.¹⁴⁴

D) One peculiar feature of our text is the presence of a list of witnesses who supposedly saw Yeshu's crucifixion and the exhuming and dragging of his body, a list that includes both Romans and Jews (see below, 9.3). Within the context of our narrative, this is surely related to the fact that when Yeshu's body was dragged through the streets of Tiberias some of his followers believed that it was him—and therefore surely realised that he did not ascend to Heaven, and that he was no son of God—but some did not believe (see below, 8.10, and cf. 8.7). Within such

¹⁴² *Mart. Conon* 4 (Musurillo 1972, 188–89). The first of these questions, πῶθεν εἶ, is modelled on John 19.9.

¹⁴³ *Mart. Justini et al.*, Recension C, 1.3 (Musurillo 1972, 54–55).

¹⁴⁴ See Van Minnen (1995, 30–31).

a context, it is important for future readers to know that the Roman emperor, the Roman governor, and many Jews testified that Yeshu's body indeed was dragged through the streets of Tiberias. But a list of witnesses also is a typical feature at the end of legal documents, such as marriage documents or business contracts. It is less expected in the protocol of a trial run by the Roman emperor or his representative, since the presence of an all-powerful judge mitigates the need for other guarantors or signatories, but it at least gives *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* the aura of an 'authentic' legal document.

Before ending our discussion of the genre of our text, two additional notes are in order. First, we must note that unlike the *Acta Pilati*, *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* never refers to itself as the *hypomnēmata* of the trial of Yeshu, or as a copy or a translation thereof. Thus, any attempt to read our text within the context of the 'authentic' Roman and Christian protocols of the trial of Jesus is based on the assumption that our text is old enough to have taken part in the interreligious polemics of the fourth or fifth centuries CE. Second, the claim that the Jews had their own *hypomnēmata* of the trial of Jesus is attested in at least one Christian text, the *Martyrdom of Conon*. There, the Roman governor asks the Christian Conon,

Why do you (pl., i.e., Christians) err, saying that a man—and one who died a violent death—is a god (or, is God)? For I have learnt accurately from the Jews what his family was, the things he showed forth to their people, and how

he was crucified to death. For they brought his protocols (αὐτοῦ τὰ ὑπομνήματα) and read them to me.¹⁴⁵

Conon was martyred in the mid-third century, but his *Martyrdom* probably was written down in the fourth or fifth century CE. Unfortunately, the author of this text does not specify in which language the Jewish protocols of the trial of Jesus were written, nor does he provide much data about their contents. *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* certainly did speak of Yeshu's family (see 3.1–3.4), of the things he showed his fellow Jews (see 2.3), and of his death on the cross (see 7.2, 7.8, 8.2), but these details are far from unique to our narrative. Thus, the author of the *Martyrdom of Conon* could easily have had in mind one of the *Acta Pilati* texts, which—as we already noted—purport to provide the ‘authentic’ Jewish protocols of the trial of Jesus.

Another possible reference to the Jewish protocols of the trial of Jesus is found in the Syriac version of the story of how Judas Kyriakos helped Queen Helena find the true Cross. There, when Helena first asks Judas where the wood of the Cross might be, he answers ‘As they say in the records (ܐܝܬܝܢ ܐܢܝ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ)’, or, in another manuscript, ‘as it is written in the protocols (ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܐܢܝ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ)’.¹⁴⁶ The first version uses the Greek loanword *χάρτης*, which refers to the material (usually papyrus) on which a text could be written; the second version uses the Greek loanword *ὑπομνήματα*, which the editors translate as

¹⁴⁵ *Mart. Conon* 4.6–7 (Musurillo 1972, 188–91). For the significance of this passage, see Horbury (1971, 382–86), and Gero (1978, 165, n. 5).

¹⁴⁶ See Drijvers and Drijvers 1997, 44–45 (Syriac text), 62–65 (English trans.).

‘official records’, but which we may also translate as ‘protocols’, as we have done thus far. However, it must be noted that when the queen further pressures Judas to tell her where the Cross is, if he knows it from the records or protocols, he suddenly insists that he was just imagining this, or even making it up (ܕܠܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ).¹⁴⁷ It is therefore far from certain that the author(s) behind this text were aware of the existence of such texts in Jewish hands.

A third possible reference to our text is found in the Syriac story of the icon of Christ made by the Jews of Tiberias at the time of the Emperor Zeno. We shall quote it in full in the following section.

V. *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*—Date and Place of Origin

Given everything that we have seen thus far, it is quite certain that *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* was first written in Aramaic, at a time when that language was still widely used by Jews; that it circulated in several Aramaic versions that probably were not very different from each other; and that it was later translated both into Hebrew and into Judaeo-Arabic. However, when it comes to the time and place in which this text was first written down, no certainty is possible, since we do not have incontrovertible external evidence of the text’s existence before the times of Agobard and Amulo, in ninth-century Lyons.

¹⁴⁷ See Drijvers and Drijvers 1997, 44–45 (Syriac text), 62–65 (English trans.).

One possible criterion for dating the text is its language. As noted above, in section III.3, our text displays many Eastern (Babylonian) Aramaic features, and some Western (Palestinian) features as well. This has given rise to two different scenarios of how this mixture came about, with Willem Smelik suggesting that the text began its life in Palestine, was modified in Babylonia, and moved to Palestine once again, and Michael Sokoloff arguing that it is a Babylonian Jewish text.¹⁴⁸ However, both scholars agree that the Aramaic of our texts points to the middle of the first millennium CE as its likely date of composition. But as we already noted, the dialectical forms appearing in our text are not consistent in any of the textual witnesses, and Ar2 presents more Jewish Palestinian Aramaic elements than the other Aramaic fragments of our text. We should therefore assume that different copyists modified the Aramaic text in line with the Aramaic forms they knew, or thought they knew, and that we have no real access to the Aramaic dialect in which the text was first written. In other words, the linguistic analysis suffices to demonstrate that our text was written in late antiquity, at a time when Aramaic was still widely spoken by Jews, and not in some ‘artificial’ Aramaic of the Middle Ages, but it is far from probative when it comes to the text’s geographical provenance.

While any suggestion of a specific provenance for our text would be quite speculative, I would tentatively like to suggest

¹⁴⁸ See Smelik (2009) and Sokoloff (2011). In July 2023, Willem Smelik told me that he no longer thinks that the Jewish Palestinian Aramaic elements in the text prove an early Palestinian origin, since they could have been added by later scribes (cf. Smelik 2025).

Tiberias of the fourth or fifth century as the original place of composition.¹⁴⁹ The arguments in favour of this provenance are of two different types: Some arguments are based upon what is found in the text itself, while others are based on what we know about Tiberias in late antiquity. Let us look at each of these arguments:

V.1. Internal Considerations

Looking at the text of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, we may note that the entire narrative unfolds in a small geographical area; much of the action takes place in Tiberias (see 1.2, 6.3, 7.1, 8.9, 9.1, 9.3), and the text also refers to Ḥammat Tiberias (see below, our comments on 1.2), and to the water-holes (?) in Tiberias where Yeshu was finally buried (8.12). In addition to these locations, we hear of Nazareth, where Yeshu is said to have been born (1.1 and 2.2); of Kephār Naḥum, where Yoḥanan the Dyer is active (4.1 and 4.2) and where Yeshu's disciples are concentrated (5.2); of the cave of Elijah, where Yeshu tries to hide (7.5); of a mountain to which he flees, which some textual witnesses identify as Mt Carmel (7.2 and 7.7); and perhaps also of the Galilean village of Roma (1.2). Other than that, the only places mentioned are

¹⁴⁹ For the suggestion that *Toledot Yeshu* was written in fourth-century Tiberias, see already Schonfield (1937, 204, 216–27); however, the *Toledot Yeshu* texts at his disposal were mostly of the 'Helena' recension, and his attempt to extract an 'Ur-Toledot' from these texts is far from convincing. For a different view, and the suggestion that Tiberias was chosen as the setting for our text because of the association between its name and that of Tiberius, see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, I:63).

Egypt, where Yeshu is said to have acquired his books of magic (2.2, 3.6 and 3.8); Africa, to where some of his disciples flee (5.2, which may not have been there in the earliest version(s) of our text); and ‘all the towns’ whose Jews fast for three days in order to nullify Yeshu’s magical act of making the king’s daughter pregnant (6.9). Such a narrow geographical focus might suggest that it is in one of these locations that the text was produced, and that the Jews of Tiberias could point to some of the locations mentioned in it and claim that this is where Yeshu was crucified, dragged through the streets, or buried. And we might even hear the echoes of such traditions when a twelfth-century Christian visitor to Tiberias saw the cave where Jesus was said to have hidden himself from the Jews (see our comments on 7.5), or when a set of ancient ruins above Tiberias are known to the local Arabs as ‘the castle of the king’s daughter’ (see our comments on 6.6).

V.2. Tiberias as a Hotbed of Jewish–Christian Conflicts in Late Antiquity

A second factor supporting the case for Tiberias as the place where *Gzar-dine de-Yeshu* came into being is that it was—together with Sepphoris—one of the two most important Jewish towns in late-antique Palestine. Unlike Sepphoris, however, it was well-known as a hotbed of anti-Christian activity, including the production and transmission—or suppression—of pro- and anti-Christian texts. One famous example is found in the Palestinian Talmud, in a story of rabbis who fight a *min* (the rabbis’ blanket term for Bible-reading heretics) in the bathhouse of Tiberias, and

how the *min* drowned when he tried to cross the Sea of Galilee (in imitation of Jesus?).¹⁵⁰ Another famous example is found in Epiphanius' detailed account of the adventures of Joseph, the Jew who converted to Christianity, became an imperial *comes*, and received from Constantine permission to build churches in several Jewish centres in the Galilee, including Tiberias.¹⁵¹ The stories that Epiphanius says that he heard from Joseph are of great interest, and for the present discussion three specific points must be highlighted: First, in Tiberias of the early fourth century there were some Jews who converted to Christianity (although in this case, the conversion itself took place in Asia Minor), but there also was great Jewish opposition to the construction of a church, even when it was carried out by someone who had the emperor's backing.¹⁵² Second, in the house of the Jewish Patriarch in Tiberias (i.e., the *Nasi*) there was a secret storeroom, in which were found Hebrew copies of the Gospel of John, the Book of Acts, and the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁵³ Third, this storeroom also

¹⁵⁰ See pt San 7.19 (25d), with Bohak (2003) and Levinson (2010).

¹⁵¹ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 30.4–12 (Holl 1915–1933, I:338–48); for an English translation, see Williams (2009, 133–41). This story has been the subject of numerous studies, and see esp. Rubin (1982); Thornton (1990); and Reiner (2004).

¹⁵² For Joseph's conversion, see Epiphanius, *Panar.* 30.11; for the Jewish opposition to his activities in Tiberias, see esp. 30.12. For a church in Tiberias that may fit Epiphanius' description, see Cytryn (2016).

¹⁵³ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 30.6. These books are what set Epiphanius on his long digression, and cf. 30.3 and 30.12.

contained God's Ineffable Name, in a written form.¹⁵⁴ This last claim, we may add, re-emerges in a text that deals with the Ineffable Name, which was written in Tiberias in the ninth or tenth century.¹⁵⁵

Looking at these three claims, we may conclude that they depict Tiberias of the fourth century as a Jewish town that witnessed Jewish-Christian polemics, rumours about secret Christian books hidden by the Jewish Patriarch, and similar rumours about the concealment of the Ineffable Name. This may provide a possible historical context for the production of texts like *Gzardina de-Yeshu*, in which the Christians are on the losing side and the Jews make use of the Ineffable Name (see below, 7.4 and 7.6). However, a much stronger argument for the Tiberian origins of our text may be made on the basis of a later Christian text, namely, *The History of the Likeness of Christ Which the Jews of Tiberias Made to Mock At*, a Syriac text edited and translated by Wallis Budge.¹⁵⁶ This text purports to tell of events that took place in Tiberias in the time of Emperor Zeno (474–491 CE), but it

¹⁵⁴ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 30.10.

¹⁵⁵ See Bohak (2015).

¹⁵⁶ Budge (1899). In what follows, I cite from his Syriac text and his English translation. An Arabic version of this text is attested in several manuscripts; see Graf (1944–1953, I:245). For Theodore Abū Qurrah's familiarity with this story in the early ninth century, see Griffith (1985, 61). The significance of this text for the study of *Toledot Yeshu* was already noted by Horbury (1971, 396–400); cf. Dvir (2020, 109–23).

probably was written several centuries later.¹⁵⁷ In this long text, Philotheos, a Christian, describes his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and focusses on his many adventures in Tiberias. Upon entering the town, he is shocked by what he sees among “the enemies of and those who hate God”, and by their scoffing and mockery.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, he does not provide any specific details about the contents of this mockery, but he does say that he looked for fellow-Christians, and found none.¹⁵⁹ He then sees a man of God, whom he had already met earlier; this divine man describes to him the long history of the Jews and their obnoxious behaviour, including the fact that they,

wrote in their covenants (ܩܪܬܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ) to their sons, and to their sons’ sons, saying, “We seized Christ, the Son of Mary, because he called himself the son of God (ܝܠܕܐ ܕܥܠܐܝܝܢ); and we delivered him over to the judgment of death (ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ), and we crucified him, and we slew him (ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ). And He did not rise of his own accord, but by favour he was buried by the children of his people. And after his death we seized his disciples

¹⁵⁷ The story itself must have enjoyed an enduring popularity, since an anonymous Christian chronicle relates how when the Crusaders were besieged in Antioch by Kerbogha in 1098, one of the bishops dreamt that the spear with which the Jews had pierced the figure of Jesus in Tiberias (ܩܪܬܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ) was preserved in the great church of Casianus, and that if they would take it with them, they would defeat their besiegers, and this indeed happened. For the Syriac text, see Chabot (1916, 59). For an English translation, see Tritton and Gibb (1933, 72).

¹⁵⁸ See Budge (1899, 161–62, 178).

¹⁵⁹ See Budge (1899, 162, 178–79).

(ܡܥܬܝܠܝܬܝܗܘܢ), and we persecuted them, and we slew them, and we drove them forth from the congregation; and they went round about begging. And you also, O children of fathers who wrought these things, make no mistake. If there should be any man who would make you to err (by following) after the doctrine of that deceiver (ܡܬܠܝܕܝܬܝܗܘܢ), or if you should find any man confessing him, as we have done even so do you.”¹⁶⁰

This is not a summary of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, and cannot serve as an indirect textual witness for our text. And yet, it incorporates many elements also found in our text, including the Jewish claim that it was the Jews who crucified Jesus (see 7.8), son of Mary (see 3.3) and that they did so because he called himself the son of God (see 2.3 and 6.5). The claim that Yeshu was a ܡܬܠܝܕܝܬܝܗܘܢ which reappears later in Philotheus’ account of what the Jews say about Jesus,¹⁶¹ is paralleled by the many occurrences of the *af^{el}* form of ܥܬܝܢ in our own text (see below, esp. 4.5, 6.1, 8.1, 8.5, and 8.7). And the call to future Jews to do unto the followers of Jesus what the Jews have done to Jesus himself is reminiscent of the curses upon Yeshu and his followers found at the end of our own text (see 9.2 and 9.4). To these elements we may add the Jewish claim that Jesus did not ascend to heaven, but was buried by his own people, a claim that may reflect the stories in our own text of how Yeshu was buried, exhumed, and buried

¹⁶⁰ See Budge (1899, 165–66, 184, with minor modifications).

¹⁶¹ Cf. Budge (1899, 180, 205). For ܡܬܠܝܕܝܬܝܗܘܢ, which Budge translated as ‘seducer’, see Sokoloff (2009, 748).

again (see 8.4, 8.9 and 8.12).¹⁶² But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this passage is that the divine man who is instructing Philotheus is explicitly stating that these claims were transmitted by the Jews in *written* covenants, or testaments, using the word ܠܚܬܘܒܐ which is a loanword from Greek, διαθήκη.¹⁶³ This might provide another perspective from which to see the witnesses adduced at the end of our text (see 9.3), which is what we would expect in a testament by the Jews' forefathers to their children and their children's children.

Before leaving this example, one more point must be stressed. Even if this speech has nothing to do with our text, *The History of the Likeness of Christ Which the Jews of Tiberias Made to Mock At* has much more to say about all the nasty things that the Jews of Tiberias supposedly did in order to denigrate Jesus and his followers. According to this text, the Jews made a mock-icon of Christ, hid it in a locked room, and inflicted torture upon it, analogous to that which their forefathers had inflicted on Jesus. Moreover, they persecuted all those who—convinced by the miracles performed by this icon—believed in Christ and his message. Thus, at the very least we may conclude that here is another piece

¹⁶² I am tempted to suggest that the claim that 'by favour (ܠܚܬܘܒܐ) he was buried by the children of his people', is a slightly garbled reference to his burial 'in Tiberias'. However, in this text Tiberias is consistently spelled ܬܝܒܪܝܐ.

¹⁶³ For ܠܚܬܘܒܐ, 'covenant, testament', see Sokoloff (2009, 301). Note that this is a loaded term, since it is also the term used for the 'Old' and 'New' 'Testaments' (I am grateful for Holger Zellentin for this suggestion).

of evidence for the centrality of Tiberias in the Jewish–Christian confrontations of late antiquity. To be sure, we have here no clear proof that *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* was first written in Tiberias in the fourth or fifth century, but I believe that this can serve as a tentative working hypothesis, an hypothesis that will have to be tested in light of new textual evidence, if and when such evidence becomes available.

VI. The Principles Guiding the Current Edition

In preparing a critical edition of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, I have taken into account several important factors. First, that some of the textual witnesses clearly are less trustworthy than others, in the sense that they display many signs of later reworkings, interpolations, or omissions. This is very clear in the case of Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B, which cannot easily be printed synoptically with the other witnesses, and which I have thus treated as indirect textual witnesses. But it is also evident in Heb2/Heb3 and in Heb5, which often have expansions that are not likely to have been there in any of the Aramaic texts, and seem like Hebrew interpolations, added at a later stage. Thus, although they will be included in the synopses below, we shall note their divergences from the other textual witnesses, and the likelihood that their texts do not reflect an early form of our text. This also means that we shall be paying attention both to the reconstruction of the earliest recoverable text and to the textual evolution of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* in its later versions.

A second factor that must be considered is that when the different Judaeo–Arabic or Hebrew textual witnesses diverge,

this may be due to different translations or paraphrases of the same Aramaic text, or to changes in translated texts that occurred during their own textual transmission. However, it may also reflect the presence of different Aramaic source texts. We can see this when the Aramaic textual witnesses overlap, and display many small differences that are not merely errors of copying or dialectical variations (see above, sections III.2 and III.4). Thus, we may assume the existence of different Aramaic texts even in cases where there is only one textual witness in Aramaic, or even none at all, and especially when the other textual witnesses diverge without displaying obvious signs of later additions and modifications.

In light of this situation, the following edition does not try to reconstruct an Aramaic Urtext, but to print the textual witnesses synoptically, and note the differences between them. However, in places where certain conclusions about the lost Aramaic text(s) that lurk behind the extant witnesses seem highly likely, they will be mentioned and discussed. To facilitate this analysis, I divided the text into textual units (1–9, as listed above) and into smaller passages (1.1, 1.2, etc.), in order to enable the synoptic comparison of all the textual witnesses at any given point in the text, and to enable internal cross-references in the textual and exegetical comments.

For each passage, I first note in which textual witnesses it is preserved, and then offer an edition and translation of each of the textual witnesses. In the editions, letters with a circle above them (Ⓢ) are only partly preserved; square brackets [] mark lacunae in the manuscripts, and letters within such brackets [Ⓢ]

mark my suggested reconstructions of such lacunae; {} mark deletions by the scribe; and < > mark additions by the scribe. And although I tried to offer a faithful transcription of each textual witness, I did add some punctuation marks here and there, mainly in order to highlight the structure of the individual sentences. In translating the texts, I did not aim for stylistic beauty, or even for fully idiomatic English, but I tried to reflect the textual and grammatical difficulties posed by the texts themselves. However, I added in parenthesis () words that are not there in the source text, but must be added to the English translation in order for it to make sense. I also added clarifications, such as (i.e., X), and references to biblical verses quoted in the text. But, in order to save space I added such glosses only in the first row in each synoptic table in which the gloss is needed.

My comments on the text are of two different types. On the one hand, there are textual notes that highlight the similarities and the differences between the textual witnesses for each passage. These are followed by exegetical comments on the contents of the passage, which seek to elucidate the significance of plot-elements and terms that are likely to have been there in the earliest Aramaic versions of our text. The aim of these comments—some of which take the form of a detailed excursus—is to facilitate the understanding of the text within the context of Jewish culture, and of Jewish–Christian relations, in late antiquity.

GZAR-DINA DE-YESHU: **TEXT, TRANSLATION,** **AND COMMENTARY**

0.0. An Introductory Interpolation

The long introductory interpolation is found only in Heb1, even though the beginning of our text is preserved in Heb2/Heb3, in Heb4, and probably also in JA1. Moreover, as shall be noted in the detailed comments below, the contents of this textual unit repeatedly contradict what is said later in the narrative, even in Heb1, thus proving that it was not a part of the original narrative. The many parallels with both canonical and non-canonical Gospels (see our comments on **0.5**, **0.7** and **0.13**), point to a Christian milieu in which this textual unit was composed, and the presence of Greek loanwords (see our comments on **0.5** and **0.7**) argues for a Byzantine origin of this long text. Moreover, its partial resemblance to some of the birth narratives in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, which shall be noted below, points to its importation from one of the ‘Helena’ texts (see our comments on **0.1**, **0.3**, **0.5**, **0.6**, **0.8**, etc.). It probably was added to the Hebrew text preserved in Heb1 by a medieval Byzantine Jewish copyist who felt that the narrative was missing important details about Yeshu’s birth and youth, and who was less worried by the fact that adding this textual unit resulted in numerous internal contradictions within the composite text.

0.1. An Introductory Interpolation: Title and Introduction

Heb1	And this is a book about the tale of Yeshu the Nazarene in the town of Nazareth, in the Galilee.	וזה ספר במשל וישו ² הנצרי בנצרת המדינה בגליל.
	In the days of King Horodos there was a certain man, and his wife—the man's name was Yoseph, and his wife's name was Miriam.	ובימי הורודוס המלך {היא} היה איש אחד ואשתו, שם האיש יוסף ושם אשתו מרים.
	And the wife was barren all her life. ¹	והאשה כל ימיה עקרה.
	And Yoseph was a God-fearing man, more than many of his generation, and he was dealing with the words of God in the synagogues.	ויוסף היה איש ירא אלהים מרבים בדורו והיה עוסק בדברי אלהים בבתי כנסיות.

The title given here to our narrative is a rather generic one—the book, or the tale (משל) about Yeshu ha-Notzri. This title will recur in Heb1 at the colophon (see below, 9.5). However, elsewhere in Heb1, we will encounter the title/incipit of the original narrative, preserved in its Aramaic form in the midst of the Hebrew text (see below, 1.1). The epithet given to Yeshu—ha-Notzri—hardly appears in the textual witnesses of our narrative, but is attested in Ar4, when it speaks about אשׁוּ הַנַּצְרִי רְשִׁיעָא, ‘the day on which Yeshu the Nazarene, the wicked, was crucified’ (see

¹ Lit., ‘all her days’.

² Lege: יישו.

below, 9.1). And it is the epithet that is applied to Yeshu in (the uncensored copies of) the Babylonian Talmud, for example in bt San 107b and Sota 47a (cited below, in our comments on 0.12).

The claim that the whole narrative unfolded in the days of King Horodos (i.e., Herod) stands in marked contrast with the rest of the narrative, where all the textual witnesses have King Tiberinus Caesar as a central protagonist, without any reference to King Herod. Even in Heb1, Horodos is never mentioned again. However, he does appear in other *Toledot Yeshu* texts, of the ‘Helena’ recension, where he is usually referred to as ‘the second Herod’ (הורודוס השני), i.e., Herod Antipas.³

Unlike the rest of our narrative, which displays little interest in Yeshu’s parents beyond their names and professions, the interpolation in Heb1 depicts Yoseph as a pious Jew (note the expression ירא אלהים, which recurs in 0.12),⁴ and Miriam as a normal woman who happened to be barren (see also below, 0.5).

0.2. An Introductory Interpolation: Yoseph and His Enemy

Heb1	But one time he (i.e., Yoseph) had a quarrel with a wicked man from Israel (i.e., a Jew) of his generation.	ופעם אחד נתקוטט עם רשע מישראל בדורו.
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³ See Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:139, 195).

⁴ This expression is used to describe Miriam’s husband in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, and see, for example, Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:213).

And in his fight he (the wicked man) said to him: "I am not my fathers' offspring if I will not destroy you from the world." And this Yoseph did not fear his words, but this wicked man had it in his heart to fornicate with Miriam his wife so as to separate her from him (i.e., from Yoseph), as he in fact did.	ואמר לו במריבתו איני בן אבותי אם לא אאבדך מן העולם. וזה יוסף לא חשש בדבריו, איך⁵ זה הרשע שם בלבו לנאוף עם מרים אשתו להפרידה ממנו וכן עשה.
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Unlike the main part of the narrative, where it is clear that Yeshu's real father was named Pandera, and was a Gentile, here he remains a nameless figure, who is depicted as wicked and cunning, and is explicitly identified as a Jew. Thus, reading Heb1 as a continuous text, we first learn that Yeshu's father was a nameless Jew, and then learn that he was a Gentile (ארמאי) named Pandera (see below, 3.2), without any attempt by the text's copyist(s) to resolve this blatant contradiction. Moreover, in the narrative of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* it is Yeshu who is repeatedly labelled רשיעא, or הרשע, 'the wicked', but here the same epithet is used to describe his Jewish father. Interestingly, Amulo claims that the Jews refer both to Jesus and to his Gentile father as 'impious', and this appellation is supported by Harkavy-A, as we shall note below, in our comments on 6.1.

Another unusual aspect of this passage is that here the act of fornication with Miriam is not due to mere lust (even though we will soon learn that she was very beautiful!), but to the fornicator's desire to take his revenge on her husband. Moreover, his

⁵ Lege: אך.

self-binding oath, ‘I am not my fathers’ offspring if I will not...’, might serve as a hint to the punishment he wanted to inflict upon Yoseph, by making sure that his son is not really his.

0.3. An Introductory Interpolation: Yoseph’s Enemy Impregnates Miriam with Yeshu

Heb1	One time, on the eve of the Sabbath, at midnight, he (Yoseph) went out to go (to) the synagogue to pray, and this wicked man was spying on him, and he opened the gate (of Yoseph’s home) and went into his bed.	פעם אחת בערב שבת כחצות הלילה יצא ללכת בית הכנסת להתפלל, וזה הרשע אורב לו ופתח השער ונכנס במטתו.
	And he had intercourse with Miriam, who thought that he was her husband, Yoseph.	ושכב עם מרים כסבורה שהוא בעלה יוסף.
	And this wicked man, after he fulfilled his desire ⁶ he closed the door as it was, ⁷ and escaped into his own home.	וזה הרשע כשעשה תאות נפשו סגר הדלת כשהיה נתעברה ⁸ ונמלט בביתו.
	And from this intercourse she became pregnant with Yeshu.	ומאותה השכיבה נתעברה לישו.

⁶ Lit., ‘when he did what his soul desired’.

⁷ For my translation, see the following note.

⁸ The word נתעברה probably crept in here from the following sentence, where it belongs. Another possibility is to understand the previous word as כשהיא, i.e., ‘when she (Miriam) became pregnant’, but then the next sentence would be redundant.

The practice of going to the synagogue to pray on midnight of the Sabbath eve (i.e., Friday night) which is here attributed to the pious Yoseph, is unattested in antiquity, and probably is a medieval innovation.⁹ But the fact that Miriam is not surprised by her husband's behaviour might be explained by the assumption, common from late antiquity onwards, that Friday night is the ideal time for *talmidei ḥakhamim*, 'disciples of the Sages', to cohabitate with their wives.¹⁰

In this version of the story, Miriam (unwittingly) becomes impregnated with Yeshu by a man who is not her husband. This would make Yeshu a *mamzer* in the common *halakhic* sense of the term; an accusation that will become explicit in 0.12. However, as we shall note below (in our comments on 3.1), the original narrative of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* probably had another sense in mind when referring to Yeshu as a *mamzer*. And unlike other versions of the story of Yeshu's birth, as found in the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, the present version does not insist on making him *ben ha-nida*, that is, the son of a woman who was menstruating when she conceived him.¹¹

⁹ See Horowitz (1989); I am grateful to Elchanan Reiner for this reference. The claim that Miriam's husband returned from the synagogue (or the *beit midrash*) at, or after, midnight, recurs in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, and see, for example, Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:82, 139, 195); it is also alluded to in Harkavy-B.

¹⁰ For the point of departure for these discussions, see *bt Ket* 62b.

¹¹ For the many versions of the birth story in *Toledot Yeshu* see Schäfer (2012); Gager and Ahuvia (2013); Barbu (2018); Goldstein (2020).

0.4. An Introductory Interpolation: Yoseph Realises What Happened

Heb1	After three months her belly swelled, and Yoseph noticed this and said to her: “Oh Miriam, my love, what is this?”	ויהי כמשלוש חדשים ומעיה טפחו, והרגיש יוסף על זה ואמר לה אי מרים אהובתי מה זו.
	She answered him: “Oh my master, from that Sabbath eve when you had intercourse with me, I felt that I have been impregnated.”	ענתה לו אי אדוני מאותו ערב שבת ששכבת [ע]מי הרגשתי כי נת>ע<ברתי.
	When Yoseph heard his wife speaking thus, ¹² he said to her: “Woe to me! What are you saying?	כשמוע יוסף את דברי אשתו כזו אמר לה אוי לי מה תאמר ¹³
	These things never happened. I will make it clear to you that this wicked man who quarrelled [with] me—he did it.”	לא היו דברים מעולם אברר לידך כי אותו הרשע שנתקטט [עמ]י הוא עשה זה.
	She said to him: “Oh my master, but I did not sin!”	אמרה לו אי אדוני ואנכי לא חטאתי.
	And because of his great love for Miriam—for she was very beautiful—he did not speak of this thing, so that it would not reach the <i>beit din</i> (i.e., the rabbinic court).	ומרוב אהבתו למרים כי היתה יפת תואר מאד לא הגיד הדבר שלא יפל בבית דין.

¹² Lit., ‘the words of his wife, thus’.

¹³ Lege: תאמרי.

It is not really clear how it is that once Yoseph realises that his wife is pregnant he knows that it was his wicked enemy who did it, but perhaps he recalled the quarrel they had, and his enemy's oath to destroy him. But his decision not to talk about this is surely due to his desire to avoid having his son labelled a *mamzer* by the local *beit din*, as will indeed happen later on (0.12). And once again, it is clear that Miriam is innocent of the sin of fornication, since she had not known that it was not her husband with whom she had slept.

0.5. An Introductory Interpolation: Yeshu is Born in a Manger

Heb1	After some time, when the foetus (in Miriam's belly) became public knowledge, he (Yoseph) was afraid of the people of that place who were saying that all her life she had been barren. And he took her, and he left Nazareth, their town, and they went to another place—his rural estate. ¹⁴	לימים בשנת פרסם ¹⁵ העובר פחד מאנשי המקום הממרים ¹⁶ כי היא כל ימיה עקרה. ויקח אותה ויצא מנצרת מדינתם והלכו במקום אחר יִבְגִּילְטִיאון שלו'. והלכו במקום אחר יִבְגִּילְטִיאון שלו'.
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¹⁴ For this translation, see the notes below.

¹⁵ Lege: כשנתפרסם, and cf. a similar expression, e.g., in Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:217): 'וכאשר נתפרסם הדבר שהיא מעוברת, 'and when it became public knowledge that she (i.e., Miriam) is pregnant'.

¹⁶ Lege: האומרים.

And the time for her giving birth came, and because of her great fear she gave birth in the manger of her¹⁷ ox.

והגיע זמן ילדותה וילדה מרוב פחדה
באבוס של שור שלה.¹⁸

The fact that Miriam was barren was already mentioned in **0.1**, and is used here to explain the fact that once she became pregnant Yoseph feared his neighbours' gossip; this makes little sense, since her pregnancy could easily have been understood as a miracle, and certainly did not imply that the child's father was not her legal husband. However, this line of reasoning recurs in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu* as well, and probably reflects the assumption that if a married woman did not bear any children for a long time, and then suddenly did, then the baby's father cannot be her legal husband.¹⁹

The story of how Yoseph and Miriam left their hometown, and how she gave birth in an ox's manger is no doubt based on the Gospel accounts (esp. Luke 2.6–7), and on the later Christian traditions based upon them, and is attested in several versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.²⁰ But the keyword here is *זינגילטיאון*, i.e., *ζευγηλατειον*, a word that is only attested in late-Byzantine Greek, mainly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and means 'rural estate'

¹⁷ Or: 'their'.

¹⁸ The last word is followed by a sign that may signify an abbreviation (i.e., שלהם), or a full stop.

¹⁹ For other versions of *Toledot Yeshu* where this claim appears see, for example, Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:141–42).

²⁰ Especially in manuscripts classified by Meerson and Schäfer as Slavic B and C; transcriptions of these manuscripts are available in their electronic database.

or ‘imperial estate’.²¹ This word clearly testifies to the environment in which the introductory interpolation was composed, or at least copied and appended to the Hebrew text of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. We shall note more Greek loanwords below, in 0.7.

0.6. An Introductory Interpolation: The Flight to Egypt

Heb1	Immediately they were afraid and they hired donkey-drivers (and) camel-drivers and went down to Egypt. Then the child grew there, and they called his name Yeshu‘a ben Yoseph.	מיד פחדו והשכירו חמרים גמלנים וירדו למצרים. אז לשם ²² נתגד[ל] הילד וקראו וקראו ²³ שמו ישוע בן יוסף.
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This passage is ultimately based on Matthew’s story of the Flight to Egypt (Matt. 2.13–23), and is paralleled in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.²⁴ Later in the narrative (0.8), we will learn that Egypt is where Yeshu learned his magic. It is noteworthy that he is here called ישוע, a name that recurs in the introductory

²¹ See Bartusis (2012, xli, 20, 348, 375–76, 459, 632–33). I have had no access to Vagiakakos (1974), who apparently argues that a *Zeugolatrió* is ‘a landed property with a house on it’ (I am grateful to Julia Krivoruchko for this reference).

²² The Hebrew is awkward, but the sense is clear; Heb1 seems to favour the word לשם, which will recur several times later on—ונתאחר לשם (0.11) and והביאום... לשם (5.3).

²³ A dittography; such dittographies occur quite regularly in Heb1, probably the result of miscopying the catchwords at the end of the pages of an earlier manuscript, and see below, 0.12, 3.6, 6.8 and 8.10.

²⁴ See, for example, Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:241).

interpolation of Heb1 side-by-side with יֵשׁוּ, whereas later in Heb1 he is consistently called יֵשׁוּ. This too probably is the result of the different origins of the first part of Heb1, as against the rest of its text. For the different spellings of Yeshu's name, see also below, our comments on 1.1.

0.7. An Introductory Interpolation: Yeshu's Brothers and Sisters

Heb1 Within a short while ²⁵ Miriam was impregnated again by fornication, time and again, and she gave birth to other sons, brothers of Yeshu the Nazarene, and they are Iakobos and Iannis and Simea, and also daughters—sisters of Yeshu.	ולימים מעטים עוד נתעברה מרים בזנות פעם ופעמים, והולידה בנים אחרים אחים שליִישׁו הנצרי, והם יָא קוֹבּוֹשׁ ²⁶ קיאניש קיסימאיה וגם בנות אחיות יֵישׁו.
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Having heard that Miriam's first pregnancy was not her fault, we are suddenly told that her next children were *again* conceived in acts of fornication. We are also told that Yeshu had three brothers, whose names are provided, and an unspecified number of sisters, who remain anonymous. Of special interest are the brothers' names: Not only are they Greek names, they are given in a sequence that displays its Byzantine Greek origins—Iakobos (pronounced in Byzantine Greek as Iakovos) *kai* (= and, pronounced in Byzantine Greek as *ke-*) Iannis *kai* Simea. Moreover, the list follows closely the list of names given in the Gospels, where Jesus is described as 'the brother of Iakôbos and Iôse and Ioudas and

²⁵ Lit., 'within a few days'.

²⁶ The scribe split the name in two.

Simôn', and his brothers are listed as 'Iacôbos and Iôsêph and Simôn and Ioudas'.²⁷ Thus, out of the four brothers listed in the Gospels, our text names Iakobos accurately, slightly garbles Simôn into Simea, turns either Ioudas or Iôsê/Iôsêph into Iannis (even though this is the Byzantine pronunciation of Iôannês, i.e., John), and omits the fourth name. Such direct or indirect dependence on the Gospel texts is very unusual for our narrative, and this is yet another sign that the entire passage was added to *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* at a late stage, and in a Greek-speaking, Christian environment.

0.8. An Introductory Interpolation: Yeshu's Learning

Heb1 And this Yeshu studied and grew great in Torah, and became sharp and wise, and also in the wisdom of Egypt— in tricks ²⁸ and magical acts— like the wizards of Egypt.	וזה יישו נתלמד ונתגדל בתורה ויצא חריף וחכם וגם בחכמת מצרים באחיזת עיניים ובכשפניות כחרטומי מצרים.
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In this passage we hear that Yeshu became a wise Torah scholar, a claim that is not really reflected elsewhere in our narrative. Apart from the introductory interpolation, Yeshu's only knowledge of Torah is that he knows that the body of a person who was hung or crucified should not be left there overnight (see below, 8.1), but other than that he is not depicted as knowledgeable in the

²⁷ See Mark 6.3: ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτος {Ἰωσή} καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος, and Matt. 13.55: οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ {Ἰωσής} καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας.

²⁸ Lit., 'seizing the eye', a rabbinic expression that usually refers to sleight of hand and other illusionary tricks; see Alexander (2005).

Torah or as wise in any other manner. His description as such may be based on the Talmudic accounts, where he is described as a disciple of R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah (see below, in our comments on 0.12). It is paralleled in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*,²⁹ and may also lie behind the statement of al-Jāḥiẓ, that the Jews claim that Jesus was ‘eloquent but silent’ (لَسْنَا سَكِيَّةً).³⁰

The assertion that Yeshu had used his time in Egypt to study magic—a claim already made by Celsus in the 170s CE—will re-emerge later in the narrative, and will be discussed below (in our comments on 3.6 and 3.8). But as we shall see there, the emphasis in our narrative is not on the magic that Yeshu had learned, but on the books of magic he supposedly acquired there. Here too, the contents of the current passage do not fit the rest of the narrative, since we will eventually be told that Yeshu’s books of magic were written by Yoḥanan the Dyer, and have nothing to do with Egypt. And the reference to the Egyptian wizards (חרטומים) appears only in Heb1, here and in 2.2 and 9.2, and is paralleled in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, which claim that Yeshu went to Egypt and studied magic from its wizards.³¹

²⁹ See esp. MS Yale Beinecke Heb. 5 (#12713), fol. 3r: והיה פקח וחריף, ולמד הרבה ונתגדל בתורה, ‘and he (Yeshu) was smart and sharp and studied a lot and grew great in Torah’; see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:142).

³⁰ Finkel (1926, 23).

³¹ See MS London, British Library Or. 3660 (#6425), fol. 4r: וילך לו אל ארץ מצרים ושם למד מן החרטומים כישופים רבים ועצומים, ‘And he went to the land of Egypt, and there he learned from the wizards many powerful acts of magic’, and cf. Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:168–69).

0.9. An Introductory Interpolation: Yoseph, Miriam, and Their Children Return Home

Heb1 And when many days passed upon them in Egypt, Yoseph said to Miriam: “By now³² the incident, and the story about you, have been forgotten by the people of our place; (so) let us return to our land and our ancestral domain.” And they arose and returned to their place, and (i.e., with) Yeshu and his brothers and his sisters.	וכשארכו הימים להם במצרים אמר יוסף למרים מעתה נשתכח המעשה וסיפור שלך מאנשי מקומנו נשוב בארצנו ובנחלתינו. וקמו וחזרו במקומם ויישו ואחיו ואחיותיו.
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It is not clear why, having told us (in 0.5) that Yoseph and his family left their town, Nazareth, the text now refers vaguely to ‘their place’, and will go on doing so in the following passages. Such inconsistencies are not unusual in the interpolated section of Heb1, but this one may be due to a copyist’s awareness of the fact that the rest of the narrative is supposed to take place in Tiberias, and not in Nazareth, and his attempt to gloss over this inconsistency. It may also have to do with the obscure claim in 0.5 that Yoseph and Miriam went to their ‘rural estate,’ whose exact location is never specified.

³² Lit., ‘from now’.

0.10. An Introductory Interpolation: Yeshu Confronts the Corrupt *beit din*

Heb1	And in those days, the <i>beit din</i> of that place was deciding the trials of the people, and they would distort the trials for bribes and favouritism.	ויהי בימים ההם ובית דין של אותו מקום היו דנין משפטי העם והיו מטים המשפטים בשוחד ובהכרת פנים.
	And this Yeshu‘a the Nazarene would sit there (or: with them), and would rebuke them, i.e., concerning justice, and they would hat[e] him because of this.	וזה ישוע הנצרי היה יושב עמה ³³ ומוכיחן פ' ³⁴ על הצדיק ³⁵ והיו מאייב[ים] לו על זה.
	And he would puff himself up over them because of this with dispute and [ani]mo[sity], and they had enough of him and were looking for a reason to drive him away from sitting between them.	והיה מתגדל עליהם על זו בריב [וב]מ[דון?], ויקוצו מפניו והיו מבקשים עילה להרחיקו ממושבו מביניהן.

Surprisingly, and in marked contrast with what will transpire throughout the rest of the narrative, in this passage Yeshu is depicted as a righteous Jew, who is confronting the evil Jewish leadership of his generation, and in so doing runs into trouble. Thus, not only are Yoseph and Miriam both honest and blameless

³³ Lege: שמה, but עמהם or עמם are also possible.

³⁴ The meaning of this abbreviation is not clear, and I opted for (פ[ירוש]), 'its meaning' (introducing an explanatory gloss).

³⁵ Lege: הצדק.

(except for the single claim of her fornication in 0.7), Yeshu himself is a *talmid ḥakham*, who boldly confronts his contemporaries when they are guilty of injustice. On the other hand, the ‘bad guys’ are all Jews—both the anonymous Jew who impregnated Miriam and the anonymous members of the corrupt *beit din*. All this is very different from the image that will emerge in the rest of our narrative, where it is ‘Yeshu the wicked’ who is always to blame.

0.11. An Introductory Interpolation: The *beit din* Finds Out the Truth about Yeshu

Heb1 One day Yeshu went out to the village on his own affair, and came there (i.e., to the *beit din*)

ויום א' יצא ישו בכפר לעסקו ונתאחר לשם.

late.

And the *beit din* summoned his mother Miriam—after her husband Yoseph had already died—and adjured her by the Name that “Tell us, this young man Yeshu‘a—from where did you get him? Whose son is he that he has been so impudent towards us?”

ובית דין קראו למרים אמו אחר שמת בעלה יוסף, והשביעוה בשם כי תאמרי לנו ישוע הבחור הזה מניין הוא לך בן מי הוא כי החציף פניו לכך³⁶ לפנינו.

Because of her ripe old age, she was afraid of the oath (by the Name) of the Lord, and she admitted to the *beit din* how the thing had happened.

מרוב זקנותה יראה משבועת יו"י והודת³⁷ לבית דין איך נהיה המעשה.

³⁶ Lege: כל כך.

³⁷ Lege: והודתה.

Adjuring people by the Ineffable Name of God was a common practice in the Jewish world, but will not recur later in the narrative—as, for example, when Yeshu will be interrogated about the origin of his books of magic. The Name itself will, however, be used by Yehudah the gardener to overcome Yeshu, as we shall see below (7.4 and 7.6). Our scribe marks out the word בשם, ‘by the Name’, to highlight its sanctity, this too being a common practice in Jewish manuscripts.³⁸ And once again, the scene contradicts what will occur later on, even in Heb1, when Yeshu admits that he is the son of the Gentile Pandera. In fact, since we now hear that the truth about his birth was already revealed by his mother, it is noteworthy that the copyist(s) of Heb1 did not omit the entire scene where Yeshu himself is interrogated about his ancestry, and provides a completely different account (see below, 3.1–3.4).

0.12. An Introductory Interpolation: The *beit din* Ejects Yeshu, Who Becomes an Apostate

Heb1 And when Yeshu returned from the village and was about to sit in his usual place, the <i>beit din</i> rose and they pushed him, and said to him thus: “No <i>mamzer</i> may enter the congregation of the Lord’.” ³⁹	וכשחזר ישו מן הכפר בא לשבת במושביו כמנהגו, קמו בית דין ודחפוהו, וכך אמרו לו לא יבא ממזר בקהל יו"י.
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³⁸ For different ways of marking the Name in Jewish manuscripts see, for example, Sacher and Lavee (2021).

³⁹ Deut. 23.3.

He said to them: “Even if it is as you say, I am wiser than you and (more) God-fearing, and I shall not withhold His rebuke from you; ‘you shall surely rebuke my people’.”⁴⁰ They answered him: “From now on, we do not accept your words, nor will you sit among us, for you are a <i>mamzer</i>.” He tried to appease them, but they were not appeased, until he gave up and distanced himself in his zeal, and Yorobeam became an apostate.⁴¹	אמר להם ואפילו אם יהיה כדברכם אני חכם מכם וירא אלהים ותוכחתו לא אמנע מכם הוכח תוכיח את עמי. ענו לו מעתה אין אנו מקבלין מקבלין⁴² דברין, אף לא תשב בנינו כי אתה ממזר. פייסם ולא נתפייסו עד שגלאה ונרחק בקנאתו ויצא ירבעם לתרבות רעה.
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Having learned the truth about Yeshu’s birth, the members of the *beit din* use the fact that from a *halakhic* perspective he is a *mamzer* in order to settle their score with him. And once again we see that in this part of Heb1 Yeshu—who elsewhere in the narrative is repeatedly characterised as ‘Yeshu the wicked’—began his life as a good person who happened to be a *mamzer*, and it was only because of the evil *beit din* that he became an apostate and a her-

⁴⁰ This quote from Lev. 19.17 is modified; the actual verse says ‘you shall surely rebuke your neighbour’. By omitting the last two letters of עמיתך, the meaning of the verse changes to ‘you shall surely rebuke my people’. The change in the verse might be due to a copyist’s error, but in this case it might also be deliberate.

⁴¹ Lit., ‘went out into an evil habit’.

⁴² A dittography; see above, our comments on 0.6.

etic. Moreover, this passage is heavily influenced by the Talmudic account about Yeshu, in which we hear that he became an apostate because of how he was treated by his teacher, Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah. The keyword here is דחפוהו, ‘they pushed him’, which echoes the Talmudic claim that Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah ‘pushed Yeshu the Nazarene with both hands (דחפו לישו הנוצרי) (בשתי ידי)’, and thus left him no choice but to turn to idolatry and to incite other Jews to follow him (bt San 107b and Sota 47a).⁴³ The Talmud also relates how Yeshu tried several times to make his teacher re-admit him to his presence, but to no avail, a description that is echoed in our story’s claim that ‘he tried to appease them, but they were not appeased’. However, as we shall see below (3.8), in our narrative Yeshu’s teacher is Yoḥanan the Dyer, and not Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah—who is one of Yeshu’s opponents from the very beginning of the narrative—so the role of pushing Yeshu out was left to the *beit din* of his own town.

This passage ends by stating that ‘Yorobeam went out into an evil habit’. The expression ‘to go out into an evil habit’, in the sense of ‘to become an apostate or a heretic (or an otherwise badly misbehaving Jew)’ is well known from rabbinic literature, with the story of Elisha ben Abuya, also known as Aḥer, as the paradigmatic example of someone who ‘went out into an evil habit’ (see bt Hag 16a). King Yorobeam is another proverbial heretic (see 1 Kgs 12.26–33; m San 10.2; etc.), and the claim that he ‘went out into an evil habit’ is found in a section of the Zohar

⁴³ For this story, see Gero (1994); Schäfer (2007, 34–40); Boyarin (2010, 52–54).

where a story is told of how Yoro-boam began his life as a righteous person; God wanted to kill him, but the angels prevented Him from doing so. However, Yoro-boam ‘subsequently went out into an evil habit’ (ובתר כן נפק לתרבות רעה), and God rebuked the angels.⁴⁴ But I am aware of no other texts that use this expression in relation to Yoro-boam, even though the statement that ‘Yoro-beam went out into an evil habit’ appears in our text as if it were a well-known proverb.

0.13. An Introductory Interpolation: Yeshu’s Miracles, Performed by Magic

Heb1	And he went to his place in the land of Galilee, and proclaimed that “I am the son of God, and believe me by the signs that I will show you.”	וילך אלמקומו ⁴⁵ בארץ הגליל, והכריז כי אני בן אלוה ותאמינו לי באותותי ⁴⁶ שאראה לכם.
	And every worthless and light-headed person gathered around him.	ונתקבצו אליו כל ריק ופוחז.
	And he would make in front of them images of birds and make them fly. He also cleaved a river of water in two, and they passed (through it) on dry land.	והיה עשה ⁴⁷ לפניהן ציורי עופות ומעפף אותן. אף נהר מים ביקע ועברו ביבשה.
	Also, they were short of bread, and he satisfied their hunger	אף נחסר להם לחם, והשביעם בככר לחם, ומים עשה בפיהם כייין.

⁴⁴ Zohar Ḥadash, Aḥarei Mot 17 (58b).

⁴⁵ Lege: אל מקומו.

⁴⁶ Lege: באותותי.

⁴⁷ Lege: עושה.

with one loaf of bread; and he made water (taste) like wine in their mouth.

And he dyed garments in the water which was inside the vat in the dyer's home—dipping it on time (?) and carrying it out dyed [according to the wish of] each person.

ובגדים הצביע במים שבוּתך⁴⁸ {הספ} הספל בבית הצבע טובע⁴⁹ בשעתו ונושאו צבוע []⁵⁰ איש ואיש.

And people came to capture him and hand him over to be tried, but he made the house dark in their eyes and escaped.

ובאו אנשים לתפשו ולמסרו בִּדְן והחשיך הבית בעינין ונמלט.

Such things he would do with his magic, and he misled all these places after him (i.e., into following him).

כאלה היה עֲשֶׂה בכשפנותו והתעה את כל המקומ' ההם אחריו.

As in previous passages, here too Yeshu returns 'to his place'—presumably, Nazareth, but the name is left unmentioned—and it is not clear how he left 'his place', where he had run into trouble with the *beit din*, and returned from there to 'his place'. In the new location, he gathers around himself various worthless followers—a description that is modelled on Abimelekh's actions in Judg. 9.4—and fools them with his words and his actions. And his claim that he is the son of God closely follows the Christian claims, and is repeated later in Heb1 (see below, 2.3, 8.5). But

⁴⁸ Lege: שבוּתך. The scribe noted the error, and added signs above the word to mark the mistaken metathesis.

⁴⁹ Lege: טובל?

⁵⁰ Probably: ברצון.

as we shall see below (6.5), in Heb1—and in several other textual witnesses—Yohanan too is depicted as a son of God.

Unlike the rest of the narrative, where Yeshu's miracles are acknowledged, but only a few are described, especially when he makes the king's daughter pregnant (6.7) and when he escapes his pursuers by performing several magical acts (7.2–7.7), here we find a long, and slightly garbled, list of his miracles, with six different entries. All these miracles are well known from other—and especially Christian and Muslim—sources:

1) Drawing images of birds and making them fly: This is a slight variation on a miracle that is first attested in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus, still a child, makes twelve birds from clay, and—when reproached by his father Joseph for doing this on the Sabbath—commands the birds to fly away, which they immediately do.⁵¹ This miracle must have become quite famous already in late antiquity, since it is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, and it remained popular in the Christian world throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, and was well known in the Muslim world as well.⁵² In the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, it is found in several slightly different versions, and serves, as here, to demonstrate the kind of magic tricks that Yeshu performed in order to stupefy his followers.⁵³ And it is also found in Harkavy-A, where only the very end of the story is extant, and in Harkavy-B, as we noted in our descriptions of these two indirect textual

⁵¹ See Burke (2010, 468–71), and Elliott (2006, 135–40).

⁵² See Berkes and Nocchi Macedo (2024), and Qur'an 3.49; 5.110, with Dzon (2011) and Zellentin (2025).

⁵³ For a detailed survey, see Kattan Gribetz (2013).

witnesses (see above, II.2.1–2). However, in our text no clay is mentioned, and Yeshu is said to make *ציורי עופות*—which could imply two-dimensional images of birds, rather than three-dimensional figurines. This might be due to a translation from another language (both Aramaic *צור* and Arabic *صَوَّرَ* are used for the making of two-dimensional images and of three-dimensional figurines), but I have not found any other version of *Toledot Yeshu* which attests to this variant of the story of Jesus and the birds.

2) Cleaving a river in two in order to cross it: This miracle, which was modelled on the crossing of the Jordan River by Elijah (2 Kgs 2.2) and Elisha (2 Kgs 2.14), and perhaps also on the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod. 14.21–22), is found neither in the canonical Gospels nor in the earlier apocryphal gospels. However, echoes of such a miracle—or, rather, several such miracles—are found in numerous sources, including several late-antique and medieval magical texts.⁵⁴ In one set of stories, it is the Jordan River that stops flowing, either when Jesus is baptised in it by John, or when Jesus seeks to cross it, thus highlighting the similarity with Elijah's and Elisha's miracles. But in another version of this miracle, Jesus is escaping his Jewish opponents, and stopping

⁵⁴ In addition to the stories mentioned below, note the story in pt San 7.11 (25d), of the *min* who cleaved the Sea of Tiberias in two, and walked in it, while reminding the rabbis who opposed him that 'Moses, your master' had performed a similar feat. This *min* may have been imitating the miracle of Jesus, when he walked on the water of the very same lake (Mark 6.48–51; Matt. 14.25–32; John 6.19–21). See above, section V.2.

the Euphrates River with his staff.⁵⁵ Our text seems to reflect a version in which Jesus cleaves the river—presumably the Jordan River—so that he and his disciples can cross it, but no further details are given. And as far as I know, this miracle is not mentioned in any other version of *Toledot Yeshu*.

3) Feeding his followers with a single loaf of bread: This miracle goes back to two separate miracles recounted in the Gospels, in one of which Jesus feeds 5,000 of his followers with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt. 14.13–21; Mark 6.31–44; Luke 9.12–17; John 6.1–14), and in the other he feeds 4,000 followers with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Matt. 15.32–39; Mark 8.1–9). In the Qur'an, Jesus is said to have prayed to God to send down from heaven a table spread with food as a sign, and God agreed (Qur'an 5.114–115), and early Muslim commentators connected these verses with the feeding miracles recounted in the Gospels.⁵⁶ Our text refers to a single loaf of bread, thus abridging the story to its bare minimum. And this miracle too is not mentioned in the other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, except for an oblique reference in Heb2/Heb3, to which we shall return in our comments on 4.1.

4) Turning water into wine: This miracle goes back to the Gospel of John, where it is described as Jesus' first miracle, performed at Cana (John 2.1–11). As far as I know, it is not mentioned in any other version of *Toledot Yeshu*.

⁵⁵ See Maltomini (1982, esp. 152–56); the text published by Maltomini was republished in Daniel and Maltomini (1990, no. 32), and discussed by Sanzo (2024, 52).

⁵⁶ See Mesherky (2021, 132–34) and Goudarzi (2023).

5) Dyeing garments in different colours by dipping them in water: In our text, the description of this miracle is somewhat garbled, and this miracle is not attested in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, but it can be interpreted in light of the Christian and Muslim accounts thereof.⁵⁷ This miracle is not found in the canonical Gospels, but is narrated in some versions of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and in the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy*, each time with slight variations of detail.⁵⁸ In the Arabic version of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the story is told of how the child Jesus went into a dyer's shop and threw different pieces of cloth which the dyer was about to dye in different colours into a single vat with black dye. When he took them out of the vat, each piece of cloth was dyed with the colour the dyer had intended for it, and all the witnesses to this miracle were greatly amazed.⁵⁹ This story was also known to the eleventh-century writer Tha'labī, who included it in his *Tales of the Prophets*, and to the eleventh- or twelfth-century Kisā'ī, who included it in his own compilation of the *Tales of the Prophets*.⁶⁰ Interestingly, some Muslim sources locate

⁵⁷ Note that our text makes no mention of the fact that Yeshu would later be involved with another 'dyer', namely Yoḥanan, as we shall see below.

⁵⁸ See Burke (2010, 359–60); Elliott (2006, 165). For one of several versions of the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy*, see Provera (1973), where the story of the dyer is found on pages 110–13.

⁵⁹ For the Arabic text and an English translation (both by Slavomír Céplö) see Burke (2017, 238–41).

⁶⁰ See Davis (2014, 168–69); Brinner (2002, 652); Thackston (1997, 333).

this miracle in Tiberias. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī (d. 1215) notes that in Tiberias there is a fountain named after Jesus, and a church of the tree (كنيسة الشجرة), in the place where Jesus performed the miracle with the dyer (الصباغ). He adds that this was Jesus’ first miracle, and wrongly states that it is mentioned in the Gospels.⁶¹ Al-Harawī provides no further details, but this must be our miracle, and the claim that it was Jesus’ first miracle fits well with the claim that it was one of his childhood miracles. Moreover, Christian pilgrims of the thirteenth century saw in Tiberias the tree which grew from the firebrand that one of the Jews had thrown at Jesus; in some versions of this story, it is stated that the Jews got angry with Jesus when he showed them how to dye clothes.⁶² We shall return to some of these stories below, in our comments on 7.5.

6) Escaping his pursuers by making darkness fall upon them: This miracle was modelled on the blinding of the people of Sodom in Gen. 19.11, and especially on Elisha’s actions in 2 Kgs 6.18, when he blinded the soldiers of Aram who came to arrest him. It is not found in the canonical Gospels, but in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* we read that when Joseph’s neighbours complained to him about the behaviour of his unruly son, Jesus decided to punish them and they were immediately struck blind.⁶³ Moreover, in the canonical Acts we read how on his way to Da-

⁶¹ See Le Strange (1890, 339); Frenkel (2008, 161); Tal (2014, 112–13). For the Arabic text and an English translation, see Meri (2004, 38–39).

⁶² See Pringle (1993–2009, II:364, no. 266).

⁶³ See Burke (2010, 480–81).

mascus Paul saw a great light from heaven, and heard Jesus asking him ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ After this, Paul was blinded for three days.⁶⁴ Such stories probably help explain the origins of the miracle attributed to Yeshu in our text. And this miracle too does not appear in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.

Looking at these miracles as a group, we may note that with the exception of the first miracle, they are not really recorded in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.⁶⁵ Moreover, they do not overlap with the miracles that Yeshu and Yoḥanan claim to be able to perform elsewhere in our narrative (see below, 6.5). They are clearly based on stories found in the Gospels and in apocryphal Christian texts, and if we could identify a medieval Christian text—or an iconographic cycle—in which all these miracles appear side-by-side, it would help us identify the historical context in which a Jewish writer could have come up with such a list of Yeshu’s miracles. This, in turn, could serve as yet another clue for the date and provenance of the long text which was eventually appended to a Hebrew translation of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* as an introductory interpolation. I suspect that it will once again point to a late-Byzantine environment, but this research has yet to be undertaken.

⁶⁴ Acts 9.3–6, and note how Paul himself blinds Elymas in Acts 13.8–11.

⁶⁵ As was already noted by Meerson and Schäfer (2014, I:75).

0.14. An Introductory Interpolation: The Jews Try to Stop Yeshu, and Go to Tiberinus Caesar

Heb1 When all of Israel (i.e., all the Jews) heard (this), they wished to uproot the evil from Israel, ⁶⁶ but could not. They went and complained to Tiberinus Caesar, the king who reigned in the Second Temple (period).	ויהי בשמוע כל ישראל בקשו לבער הרע מישראל ולא יכולו. הלכו וקבלו אל טברינוס קסר המלך המולך בבית שני.
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This passage clearly serves as a ‘bridge’ between the interpolated introductory passage and the opening scene of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. This is also why having told us at the beginning of the text that the narrative unfolded ‘in the days of King Horodos’ (0.1), Heb1 must now state that the Jews went to Tiberinus Caesar, ‘the king who reigned in the Second Temple (period)’, since he will be a major protagonist in the rest of the narrative.

⁶⁶ For the Hebrew expression used here, see Deut. 17.22 and 22.22.

1.0. Setting the Stage

Like many texts in antiquity and the Middle Ages, the incipit of our text can also serve as its title, which may also be mentioned at the end of the text (see below, 9.5). And, in an attempt to sound official, our text immediately moves to the technical details: the identity of the culprit, the nature of the accusation against him, the time and place where the proceedings took place, the officials who were in charge, and who initiated the entire process.¹

1.1. Setting the Stage: A Title/Incipit; Introducing the Main Event and the Main Culprit

Textual Witnesses: JA1, Heb1, Heb2, Heb3, Heb4

JA1	[This is the Bo]ok of Yes[hu] the Her[etic who violated] the will of the Master of Heaven and misled the people after him; and he was from [a town] called Nazareth.	הדא? כת]אב יש[ו] אלמ[א]רק אלדי נכת ב[טאעַת רב] אל[סמא ואסל ² אלנאס וראה והו מן [מדינ]ה יקאל להא נאצרה.
Heb1	The sentencing that was decreed upon Yeshu son of Pandera, who denied the God of Heaven and erred and misled the world; who was	גזר דינא דאית גזרת ³ עלוהי על יישו בן פנדירא דכפר באלהא דשמיא ותעה והתעה את העולם אשר היה ממדינת נצרת דרומי רבתה וכפר באלהי העו'.

¹ See the fuller discussion of these issues above, in section IV.3 of the Introduction.

² Lege: **ואצל**, i.e., **وَأَصَلَ**. For JA1's confusion between **ص**, **ض**, and **س**, see also below, 6.8.

³ Lege: **דאיתגזרת**. As **גזר דינא** is masculine, one would expect **דאיתגזר**.

from the town of Nazareth of the Great Rome, and denied the God of the world.

Heb2 This is the book of the sentencing that was decreed upon Yeshu'a son of Pandera. And it was in the year two of Tiberinus Caesar, the king of Edom (i.e., Rome), they decreed a trial upon Yeshu'a son of Pandera who rebelled against the God of Heaven, for he misled the people of the world with deeds of magic. And he was from the town Nazareth in the land of the town Rome, which this thing happened in the town of the Jews.

Heb3 In the Name of the Merciful One. This is the book of the sentencing that was decreed upon Yeshu'a son of Pandera. And it was in the year two of Tiberinus Caesar, the king of Edom (i.e., Rome), he decreed a trial upon Yeshu'a who rebelled against the God of Heaven, for he misled the

זה ספר גזיר דין שנגזר על ישוע בן פנדירא ויהי בשנת {אר} שנים לטברינוס קיסר מלך אדום כרתו משפ{ש}> על ישוע בן פנדירא אשר מרד על אלהי השמים. כי התעה את אנשי עולם במעשיו⁴ הכשפים והוא היה מן דינת⁵ נצרת בארץ רומי תמדינה⁶ אשר נהיה זה הדבר במדינת יהודים.

בש' רח'. זה ספר גזרדין שנגזר על ישוע בן פנדירה. ויהי בשנת שנים לטברינוס קיסר מלך אדום כרת משפט על ישוע אשר מרד על אלהי השמים כי התעה את אנש[י] עולם במעשה הכשפים והוא היה ממדינת נצרת בארץ רומיה⁷ המדינה אשר נהיה זה הדבר במדינת יהודים.

⁴ Lege: במעשי.

⁵ Lege: ממדינת.

⁶ Lege: המדינה.

⁷ Lege: רומי.

people of the world with a deed
of magic. And he was from the
town Nazareth in the land of
the town Rome, which this
thing happened in the town of
the Jews.

- Heb4 The Scroll of Yeshu: This is the
sentencing that was [de]cre[ed]
upon Yeshu son of] Pandera,
the wicked, wh[o denied] the
God of Heaven and misle[d the
world] after him that he was
from Nazareth [...] in the Great
Rome.
- מגלת יישו⁸ זה גזר רדין אשר
[נ]גזר על יישו בן פנדירא הרשע
אש[ר כפר] באלהי השמים והתעה
את העולם אחריו שהוא מן נצרת
[... ברומי הגדולה.

No Aramaic fragments of this passage have been preserved, but the original Aramaic incipit probably is preserved in Heb1's גזר דינא דאיתגזרת עלוהי על יישו בן פנדירא דכפר באלהא דשמיא after which Heb1 reverts to Hebrew, ותעה והתעה את העולם. This incipit is also reflected in Heb2/Heb3 and in Heb4. Interestingly, this incipit recurs, with minor variations, as the colophon of several *Toledot Yeshu* texts from the 'Helena' recension, which were classified by Meerson and Schäfer as Late Yemenite A.⁹ For example, one manuscript reads:

זה השלמת מעשה ישו בן פנדירא וזהו דינו דכפר באלהא רבא ואטעי כל
עמא בתרוי שהוא יושב בנצרת רומי תחרוב ו[צ]תצדי שר"י.

⁸ The title is highlighted with five triangular sets of dots above it.

⁹ See Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:125), and Horbury (2020, 22–23).

This is the end of the story of Yeshu ben Pandera, and this is¹⁰ his sentence, who denied the great God and misled the whole people after him, who was dwelling in the town of Nazareth (of) Rome, may it be destroyed and become desolate, may the name of the wicked rot.¹¹

The other manuscripts have a very similar text, but omit the verb תצדי, and state that Yeshu misled ‘the whole world’ (כל עלמא), rather than ‘the whole people’, a difference to which we shall return below.

The incipit of JA1 is fragmentarily preserved, but it seems not to refer to ‘the sentencing that was decreed upon Yeshu’ (one would expect a noun like חכם, or קצ'א), and to call itself ‘the Book of Yeshu the Heretic’. However, as we shall see below (9.5), JA1 ends with תם גזר דין ישו אלמארק, ‘here ends The Sentencing of Yeshu the Heretic’, thus embedding a slightly corrupt version of the Aramaic title within a sentence in Judaeo-Arabic.

The title, *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, fits well with the narrative’s focus on the investigation, trial, and execution of Yeshu, and with the quasi-legalistic nature of the entire narrative (for which see section IV of the Introduction). Moreover, this title probably is reflected in Heb1’s rendition of 6.13, where R. Yehoshu‘a and Marinus ask Tiberinus Caesar מה ד>י<ן גזר המלך עליהם, ‘what sentencing does the king decree upon them’ (i.e., upon Yeshu and Yoḥanan), and is echoed in the claim, found in 9.2, that God עבד דינא upon Yeshu. Interestingly, the expression גזר דינא recurs in

¹⁰ All the manuscripts read וזהו, which probably is due to a miscopying of גזר.

¹¹ MS New York, JTS 4934a (Rab. 2343) (#49783), fol. 66r.

other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, but in a different context, namely, in the list of holidays established by the Christians as alternatives for the Jewish holidays.¹²

All the textual witnesses, except for JA1, refer to Yeshu as ‘the son of Pandera’. Below (3.2) we shall hear Yeshu himself admitting that his father was a Gentile named Pandera, and we shall discuss that name. However, that passage is omitted by JA1, which attributes to Yeshu a different father (see our comments on 3.1). Thus, JA1’s omission of that appellation in the current passage is no accident, but a deliberate editorial choice, since the name Pandera is nowhere to be found in JA1.¹³

All the textual witnesses agree that Yeshu was an offender against God, but they formulate this claim in slightly different words. As we already noted, Heb1’s characterisation of Yeshu as one who *כפר באלהא דשמיא* probably reflects the Aramaic text from which Heb1 was translated. However, Heb2/Heb3’s claim that he *מרד על אלהי השמים* probably reflects an Aramaic text which had

¹² See MS Jerusalem, Benayahu B 25 (#43794), fol. 39r and MS Sassoon 793 (#9074), page 364, where a Rabbi Yoḥanan says to the followers of Yeshu that Yeshu commanded them that *ותחת כפור עשו צומא רבא גזר* and as a substitute for (Yom) Kippur, you should establish the great fast of *gzar-dina*’ (Sassoon 793 omits the word *עשו*). See Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:135). The word rendered here as *גזר דינא* appears as *גזרתא* in other copies, and see Stökl Ben Ezra (2009, 490), and Stadel (2020, 286–87). I am grateful to Sacha Stern for sharing with me his identification of this Christian holiday as the Fast (or, Rogation) of the Ninevites.

¹³ For more on this tendency of JA1, see our description of this textual witness in section II.1.6 of the Introduction.

this verb, since it re-emerges very clearly in 8.9, where three Aramaic textual witnesses use the expression דמרד באלהא רבא דבשמיא and two Hebrew textual witnesses support that reading, and in 9.3, where both Ar1 and Heb1 repeat the same formula. This characterisation of Yeshu is intriguing, since it is not really supported by his actions throughout the text, where he appears as a deceiver and a magician, but not necessarily as a rebel against God.

JA1 next refers to Yeshu misleading the people (אלנאס). The discrepancy between ‘the world’ (Heb1, Heb2/Heb3) and ‘the people’ (JA1) probably reflects a similar variation in the Aramaic texts between עלמא and עמא, which is visible elsewhere in the text (see below, our comments on 4.2 and on 6.1, and note the occurrence of this variation in the Yemenite manuscripts of the ‘Helena’ recension that were mentioned above). The variant עמא, ‘the people’ probably preserves the earliest form of the text, as it is paralleled by claims in early Christian literature that Yeshu was accused by the Jews of misleading the people, to which we will turn in a moment. Moreover, the expression ‘all the people’ in the sense of ‘all the Jews’ is attested already in the Second Temple period, and the shift between כל עמא in Palestinian sources and כולי עלמא in their Babylonian parallels is well known from rabbinic literature.¹⁴ It therefore seems likely that the shift

¹⁴ For ‘all the people’, see the doomsday prophecy of Yeshu‘a ben Hananiah, as recorded by Josephus (*War* 6.301): ‘A voice from the East, a voice from the West, a voice from the four directions, a voice on Jerusalem and the Temple, a voice on bridegroom and bride, a voice on the entire people’ (φωνὴ ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν πάντα). For the shift from עמא in Palestinian rabbinic texts to עלמא in Babylonian texts, see Friedman (2014, 103–8).

between עמא and עלמא and their Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic equivalents in the different textual witnesses of our text is due to those scribes who chose to change the earlier, Palestinian, form עמא to the Babylonian form עלמא.¹⁵

All four witnesses agree that Yeshu came from Nazareth, but the exact wording of this statement is corrupt in all the Hebrew versions.¹⁶ Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4 all refer to Nazareth in relation to Rome, but in all four texts the connection is not really clear. It could be a rather simple assertion that Nazareth was a part of the Roman Empire, but it may also be a garbled reference to the town Roma, in the Galilee, for which see the next passage. Moreover, Heb2/Heb3 add the year in which the events took place, a statement that probably belongs in the following passage (see below). They also use an unusual idiom, כרת(ו) משפט, which I translated as ‘decreed a trial’.

Heb2/Heb3 call Yeshu ישוע, which is, of course, a more accurate rendition of Jesus’ Hebrew name. However, as this name is based on the root ישע, and is close to the word ישועה, ‘salvation’, most Jews throughout history preferred not to use this name, and to call him ישו instead. In some cases, ישו was taken as an acronym

¹⁵ And note how in a late rabbinic *midrash*, we hear that Balaam had prophesied that ‘a man born of woman will rise and seek to make himself a God and to mislead the whole world’ (וילהטעות כל העולם כולו), with a clear reference to Jesus. See Jellinek (1853–1857, V:207–8), with Urbach (1956, 287; reprinted in Urbach 1988, 552).

¹⁶ As was noted above, they are also corrupt in the colophons of the ‘Helena’ texts in which our passage is partly quoted, where it is claimed that Yeshu ‘was dwelling in the town of Nazareth (of) Rome’.

for *ימח שמו וזכרו*, ‘may his name, and the memory of him, be blotted out’, but it is not clear whether the different transmitters and readers of our text were aware of this derogatory etymology. Heb4 consistently calls him *ישו*, and Heb1 alternates between *ישו* and *ישו* (with the exception of the introductory interpolation, where he is also called *ישוע*, and see section II.1.11 of the Introduction). But it is not clear whether they attributed any specific significance to these spellings, and the spelling *ישו* probably reflects the pronunciation of Jesus’ name in the Eastern Aramaic dialects.¹⁷ Heb4 also refers to Yeshu as *הרשע*, ‘the wicked’, which reflects the appellation *רשעא* in the Aramaic texts, on which see below (6.1).

Finally, Heb4 adds a title, ‘The Scroll of Yeshu’, which is not attested in any of the other textual witnesses, and is modelled on such titles as ‘The Scroll of Esther’ or ‘The Scroll of Antiochus’.¹⁸

The claim that Jesus was misleading the Jews is one of the oldest accusations levelled against him. Note, for example, Matt. 27.63, where the chief priests and the Pharisees refer to Jesus as ‘that deceiver’ (*ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος*); Luke 23.2, ‘And they began to

¹⁷ For the spelling *ܝܫܘܥ* in Syriac, see, for example, Moriggi (2014, 48), and note the spelling *ישו* in a Babylonian Jewish Aramaic incantation bowl (Levene 1999, 287, 290 and 301, and Levene 2003, 124, 127 and 137), and the spelling *yṣw* in a Parthian amulet (Henning 1947, 50, and cf. 40). I am grateful to Ohad Abudraham for these references.

¹⁸ For the generic resemblance of (some versions of) *Toledot Yeshu* and the Scroll of Esther, see Kattan Gribetz (2011).

accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man misleading our *ethnos*...’ (τοῦτον εὗραμεν διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν...); or John 7.12, where some Jews say that Jesus is a good person, but others insist that ‘he is deceiving the crowd’ (πλανᾷ τὸν ὄχλον).¹⁹ This claim recurs in many other early Christian texts, such as Justin, *Dialogue* 69.7, who says that the Jews ‘impudently said that he was a magician and a deceiver of the people’ (μάγον... καὶ λαοπλάνον).²⁰ And it emerges once again in the Babylonian Talmud, as we shall note below, in our comments on 2.1.

1.2. Setting the Stage: Year, Place and Initiator(s) of the Proceedings

Textual Witnesses: JA1, Heb1, Heb4 (in Heb2/Heb3, this was included in the previous passage)

JA1	It was written in the year four of Tiberinus Caesar that when the king heard about him (i.e., Yeshu), he ordered Pelatus the governor to investigate about him.	וכתב פי סנה ארבעה לטברניוס קיסר לאן למא אתצל כברה באלמלך אמר לפלטוס אלקאיד יתקצא ענה.
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¹⁹ And cf. John 7.47, ‘has he deceived you too?’ (Μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς πεπλάνησθε). For additional references, see Stanton (1994, reprinted in Stanton 2004, 127–47), and note how the description of Simon Magus in Acts 8.9 as μαγεύων καὶ ἐξιστάνων τὸ ἔθνος τῆς Σαμαρίας, ‘practising magic and amazing the *ethnos* of Samaria’, is rendered by the Peshitta as ܠܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ, ‘he was deceiving (מטעא) the people (עמא) of Samaria with his magic (בחרשוהי)’.

²⁰ And cf. Justin, *Dialogue* 108.2, or John Chrysostom, *Expositio in Psalmos* on Ps. 8.3. For additional examples, see Minov (2022).

- Heb1 In the year four of King Tiberinus Caesar, there was a man named Ilyagos, and Platos the governor who were from RWM in the district of Tiberias, who were from the town of Rome, in the place of Thermae, the district of the sea.
- Heb4 In [the year four?] of Tiberianus Cae[sar...Pilatus] the governor, who was [...] the great district.
- בשנת ארבע לטברינו[ס] קיסר המלך
והיה איש ושמו אִילִיגּוֹס ופִּלְטוֹס
הגמונה דהוו מן רומ בטברִיָא מְחוּזָא
אשר היו ממדינת רומי במקום תירמא
מחוז הים.
- ב[שנת ארבע?] לטבריאנוס קי[סר]...
פילטוס[ההגמון שהיה [...]] המחוז
הגדול.

JA1 and Heb1 agree that the proceedings took place in the fourth year of Tiberinus. In Heb2/Heb3, the date is mentioned in the previous passage and is given as year two, but in Heb2 one can see how the scribe began to write ‘four’, but erased the word after two letters and wrote ‘two’ instead. Apparently, he too had in front of him a text that spoke of year four, but it is not clear why he, or an earlier copyist of the text, changed the year to ‘two’.

The attempt to offer a precise date for Yeshu’s trial probably is a part of the text’s desire to present itself as the ‘authentic’ protocols of his trial. In the Christian *Acta Pilati*, one of the two prologues with which the text often begins offers a much more detailed dating for the proceedings that will follow. This includes the year of Tiberius’ reign, the year of Herod’s rule, the exact date (the twenty-fifth of March; see also below, in our comments on 9.1), the name of the consuls of that year, the year according to the Olympic cycle, and the identity of the Jewish high priest at the time (Joseph Caiaphas).²¹

²¹ Tischendorf (1853, 204–6).

The claim that the proceedings took place in year four of Caesar Tiberius stands in marked contrast with the chronology offered by the Gospel of Luke, which states that the ministry of John the Baptist began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign (Luke 3.1). It also makes no sense from a historical perspective, since year four of Tiberius would have been 18 CE, long before Pontius Pilate became the governor of Judaea in 26/27 CE. But this unlikely dating might provide an important link with the anti-Christian *hypomnēmata* that were known to Eusebius.²² For in one of several references to the forged protocols of the trial of Jesus, Eusebius says that Josephus states that Pontius Pilate became the governor of Judaea in the twelfth year of Tiberius. This, he adds,

is clear proof of the forgery of those who recently or formerly have issued a series of protocols about our Saviour (κατὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ὑπομνήματα); for in them the dates mentioned convict the forgers of untruth. They relate that the crime of the Saviour's death fell in the fourth consulship of Tiberius, which was the seventh year of his reign (ἐπὶ τῆς τετάρτης δ' οὖν ὑπατείας Τιβερίου, ἣ γέγονεν ἔτους ἐβδόμου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ), but at that time it has been shown that Pilate was not yet in charge of Judaea.²³

Our text does not distinguish between the consulships of Tiberius and the years of his reign, but the fact that Eusebius already knew of forged protocols of the trial of Jesus in which the trial was dated

²² For the Roman *Acta Pilati*, see esp. Dubois (1991), and cf. our discussion thereof in section IV.3 of the Introduction.

²³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.9.3 (LCL tr.; I have changed the translator's 'Pilate's Reports' to 'protocols').

to the fourth year of Tiberius—and several years before Pontius Pilate became the governor of Judaea—lends further support to the great antiquity of at least some components of our text.²⁴

The identity of the person who initiated the investigation is not entirely clear. JA1 states that Tiberinus heard about Yeshu, and ordered Pilatus to start an investigation. Heb1 introduces a mysterious person called אִלְיָגוֹס, ‘Ilyagos’, whose identity and role are not explained. Later in Heb1, we find the two as אֲלִטְיוֹס אֶלְטִיגוֹס, ‘Altigus and Pilatus the governor’ (4.3) and towards the end of Heb1, it speaks of פִּילָטוֹס הַהִגְמוֹן וְאֲלִטְיוֹס מְשֻׁנָּה שְׁלוֹ, ‘Pilatus the governor and Altigus his deputy’ (9.3), with all three passages presumably referring to the same person. Whether this person is the same as אֲלִטְיוֹס / אֶלְטִיגוֹסוֹן / אֲלִטְיוֹס / אֶלְטִיגוֹס, who is mentioned later in the text is not really clear, and we shall return to this issue below in our comments on 4.2 and on 4.6.

In Heb1 and Heb4, Pilatus is called a הַגְמוֹן, with Heb1 even preserving the (Palestinian) Aramaic form הַגְמוֹנָה. This appellation is found in the Aramaic fragments as הַגְמוֹנָא and הַגְמוֹנָא (see below, 6.1, 6.3, 6.8, 8.6, 8.10, 8.11 and 9.3), and accurately preserves Pilate’s title, as seen, for example, in Matt. 27.2: ‘And they bound him (i.e., Jesus) and brought him and handed him over to Pilate the governor’ (Πιλάτῳ τῷ ἡγεμόνι).²⁵ The same title

²⁴ However, it must also be noted that according to our narrative, the actual execution of Yeshu would have taken place in year five or six of Tiberinus Caesar, as we shall note in our comments on 9.1.

²⁵ See also Luke 3.1; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.55. For the extensive use of the title *hêgemôn* for different Roman officials, including provincial governors, see Mason (1974, 144–51, esp. 148–49).

is also found in Syriac texts that mention Pilate, as well as in the Greek *Acta Pilati* texts.²⁶

Heb1 also refers to Tiberias as the place where the proceedings began. More specifically, it uses the Greek word *θέρμα*, *תירמא* or *θέρμαι*, ‘hot springs, hot baths’, i.e., the famous thermal springs and bathhouse complex of Ḥammat Tiberias, immediately to the south of Roman–Byzantine Tiberias.²⁷ It also uses the Aramaic word *מחוזא* and its Hebrew equivalent, *מחוז*, which is also attested in Heb4; the word (*מחוזא*) probably was there in the Aramaic text, and referred either to a ‘town’ or ‘district’ or to a ‘harbour’—i.e., the harbour of Tiberias or of Ḥammat Tiberias.²⁸ As both locations lie on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the narrative may be assuming either of these locations as the place where Pilatus held court, and where the investigation began. Thus, the phrase *אשר היו ממדינת רומי במקום תירמא מחוז הים*, ‘who were from the town of Rome, in the place of Thermae, the town/harbour of the sea’, may be the Hebrew translation, and therefore a duplication, of the Aramaic *דהוּוּ מן רומ בְּטַבְרִיָא מְחוּזָא*, ‘who were from RWM in the

²⁶ See, for example, Sokoloff (2009, 340): *ܦܝܠܬܐ ܡܢ ܚܘܡܐ*, and Tischendorf (1853, 208, 209, 210, etc.).

²⁷ The word *תירמא* is as yet unattested in Aramaic. For the entry of this Greek word into Arabic (*الثيرما*), referring to the *thermae* of Constantinople), see Frenkel (2008, 162); Tal (2014, 116 and n. 61), and Meri (2004, 41).

²⁸ For *מחוזא*, see Cook (2015, 136, ‘harbour’); Sokoloff (2017, 326, ‘harbour, district’); Sokoloff (2020, 614, ‘walled city, town’). See also Cotton and Greenfield (1995, reprinted in Cotton 2022, 275–83).

town/harbour of Tiberias', and the obscure רומ בטבריא may be a miscopying of חמי טבריה or חמת טבריה.²⁹

The claim that 'they'—presumably, Ilyagos and Pilatus—were רומי, 'from the town of Rome', may be a duplication of the reference to רומ בטבריא, but may also be an attempt to present them as Romans, who came from Rome itself. However, as with the references to רומי in the previous passage, there may have been a reference here not to the capital of the Roman Empire, but to the Galilean village Ro(u)ma. This village was already mentioned by Josephus, who noted that two of the Jewish heroes who fought together with him during the siege of Yodephat were Galileans who came 'from the village of Rouma' (ἀπὸ 'Ρούμας κώμης).³⁰ In rabbinic literature, there is a famous story of how the third-century Palestinian Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Levi met the

²⁹ See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.36, who says that Tiberias was founded not far from the hot spring (θερμά) in a village called Ammathous. In *War* 4.11 he again refers to Ammathous, and says that its name—clearly derived from Aramaic חמה, חמתה, 'hot spring' (see Sokoloff 2017, 209)—may be translated as θερμά, and that the spring of hot water is good for healing. In *War* 2.615 and *Life* 85, Josephus again refers to the hot baths/springs of Tiberias (τοῖς ἐν Τιβερίადι θερμοῖς ὕδασι), and their medicinal properties. Rabbinic literature offers numerous references to the hot springs and bathhouses of Tiberias (see, for example, Yudilovits 1950, 6, 20–21), and note Malalas' description, cited below, of how the hot baths of Tiberias required no artificial heating, as they could rely on the hot water (ὕδατα θερμά) which was naturally found there.

³⁰ Josephus, *War* 3.233.

Messiah, who was sitting at the gates of Rome (אפיתחא דרומי).³¹ This tradition is also found in the Palestinian Targums to Exod. 12.42, which recount how, in the eschaton, משה יפוק מן גו מדברא, ומלכא משיחא מן גו רומא, ‘Moses will set out from the desert, and the king Messiah will set out from Rome’, and in many later rabbinic texts.³² And it reappears, in the sixth or seventh century, in *Sefer Zerubavel*, where the protagonist, the biblical Zerubavel ben She’altiel, recounts how he was teleported to Nineveh, which is the Great Rome (רומי רבתי), and encountered there the Messiah, all weak and wounded.³³ In the ninth century, it was known to Amulo, who says that the Jews fabricated a belief in two Messiahs, one of whom—the Messiah son of David—was born on the night when the Temple was destroyed, and ‘was transported to Rome (I have no idea how!), and is there until today, enclosed in secret caves and crypts’ (*et nescio quibus modis Romam esse perductum ibique usque hodie in speluncis et cryptis abditis esse*

³¹ bt San 98a; the printed text merely says אפיתחא דקרתא, ‘at the gate of the city’, but all the manuscripts and early printed editions read רומי or רוי’ (מי).

³² See Klein (1978) with Klein (1980, 80 and 244), and cf. Tanhuma Ex. 1.8; Ex.R. 1.26 (Shinan 1984, 83); Agadat Bereshit 23.1 (Jellinek 1853–1857, IV:35); Pesikta Rabbati 90b.

³³ For the Hebrew text, see Lévi (1914a, 132), and Even-Shmuel (2017, 72–73); for an English translation see Himmelfarb (2017, 149). For recent assessments of *Sefer Zerubavel*’s date of composition, see Newman (2013), who argues for the early to mid-sixth century, and Himmelfarb (2017, 27–34), who supports the more commonly accepted dating to the period of the Byzanto–Persian wars of the early seventh century.

reclusum).³⁴ In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, several Kabbalists suggested that this was not imperial Rome, but the one in the Galilee.³⁵ It is impossible to tell how far back such traditions went, but the Galilean contexts of the Messiah are well attested in many other sources.³⁶ And the village Roma is still mentioned in Arabic sources, and has retained its ancient name in Ḥirbet Rouma, some ten kilometres north of Nazareth and twenty-one kilometres west of Tiberias.³⁷

The fact that the investigation, trial, and execution of Yeshu all took place in Tiberias is in marked contrast with the account in the Gospels, all of which agree that Jesus was caught, tried, and crucified in Jerusalem. It is, however, a part of a larger trend in late-antique Judaism, to ‘transfer’ different historical events to the Galilee, even though earlier accounts of these events make a Galilean location improbable.³⁸

³⁴ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 12 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 20). Amulo even mentions the Jews’ claim that this Messiah was met by ‘one of their great teachers, who was called *Iosue Ben Levi*’.

³⁵ This also helped them solve another difficulty, namely, the claim that Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi, who lived in Sepphoris in the early third century, could maintain close relationships with the Roman emperor Antoninus, including by way of an underground tunnel that connected their homes, as in *bt AZ 10b*.

³⁶ For a fuller discussion, see Dvir (2020, esp. 181–83).

³⁷ See Tal (2014, 115 and 265).

³⁸ For this trend, which is due to the decline of the Jewish communities of historical Judaea and the rise of the Galilean Jewish centres, see Reiner (1998) and Dvir (2020); and cf. Rosenson (2013). For more examples of this trend, see our comments on 9.2, below.

The ‘re-location’ of the trial of Yeshu to Tiberias is directly related to another unusual claim of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, namely, that Tiberinus Caesar presided over the proceedings and was deeply involved in the trial. Whereas the Gospels have Pontius Pilate presiding over the trial and execution of Jesus, *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* has Pilatus initiate the investigation, but later Tiberinus Caesar—and his daughter—become deeply involved in the proceedings (see below, 6.2–6.14).

Historically, Tiberias was founded by Herod Antipas in 19 CE, and named after the reigning emperor, Tiberius.³⁹ But in the mind of the author(s) of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, it seems that Tiberinus Caesar lives in Tiberias, which is named after him, and runs his affairs from there.⁴⁰ Such a claim might seem quite ridiculous to a modern reader, but it may have seemed less bizarre to a late-antique audience. Note, for example, the rabbinic story of Hadrian’s (long) stay in Tiberias, which may be supported by Epiphanius’ reference to an unfinished *Hadrianeion* temple in that

³⁹ See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.36–38 and *War* 2.168; and cf. Gen.R. 23.4 (Theodor and Albeck 1912–1927, 221): ‘Tiberias was named after Tiberius, Alexandria after Alexander, Antiochia after Antiochus’. This tradition may imply that all three kings built the cities named after them, and cf. the following note.

⁴⁰ The notion that Tiberius himself had founded Tiberias is shared by the Byzantine chroniclers, from Malalas onwards, and see his *Chronographia* (Dindorf 1831, 235): ‘Tiberius himself built in the land of Judaea, next to the lake, a town which he called Tiberias; having found in that place hot springs (ὑδάτα θερμά), he built for the town public baths, which had no (artificial) heating, but used these hot springs for the benefit of the town’.

town.⁴¹ Even more intriguing is the rabbinic claim that the emperor Diocletian used to be a pig-herder in Tiberias before he became the king of Rome.⁴² That Diocletian indeed visited Tiberias—but as an emperor rather than a pig-herder—is made clear by the edicts he issued there.⁴³ Moreover, Tiberias may have had a large *praetorium*, in which the Roman governors occasionally conducted trials, and such a structure may have been seen by the authors of our narrative as the structure in which Jesus too was tried.⁴⁴

1.3. Setting the Stage: Date and *dramatis personae*

Textual witnesses: JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	When it was in the twenty-eighth of Elul, Pelatus the governor summoned Yehudah the gardener. And Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus the great elder and a crowd of elders were present.	פלמא כאן פי ח' כ' יום פי שהר אֵלול אסתדעא פלטוס אלקאיד ביהודה אלגנאן וכאן חאצר יהושוע בן פרחיה ומרינוס אלשיך אלכביר וגמאעה מן אלשיוך.
Heb1	On the twenty-eighth day of the month of Elul, this Pilatus	בעשרים ושמונה ימים בחדש אלול קרב בשוק המדינא <י>שלו זה

⁴¹ See Lev.R. 25.5 (Margalioth 1953–1960, 576–79); Epiphanius, *Panar.* 30.12.2 (Holl 1915–1933, I:347), with Shahar (2021, 242–46).

⁴² See Gen. R. 63.8 (Theodor and Albeck 1912–1927, 688–90) and pt Ter 8.11 (46b-c).

⁴³ See *Codex Justinianus* I.51.1, IV.10.3, and V.17.3, in Krüger (1877, 88, 153 and 212 respectively), with Shahar (2021, 254–57).

⁴⁴ For an attempt to identify a large structure in the south of Tiberias as a *praetorium*, and literary evidence that points to the existence of such a *praetorium* in Tiberias, see Patrich et al. (2022).

the governor approached the market of his town and summoned Yehudah, the owner of the garden, and took him and brought him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah, and before Marinus the great elder of the Jews, and before a great multitude with people.

Heb2 On this day, on the twenty-eighth of the month of Elul, Petalus the governor approached and came into the market, and summoned Yehudah the orchard-man, and he took him before Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi, and he brought him before Marinus the elder of the Jews and in front of crowds of people.

Heb3 On that day, on the twenty-eighth of the month of Elul, Pelatus the governor came into the market, and summoned Yehudah the orchard-man, and he took him before Rav Yehoshu'a ben Rav Peraḥiah, the Nasi, [and brou]ght him before Marinus the elder of the Jews and in front of a crowd of Sages, may their memory be for a blessing.

פילטוס ההגמון וקרא ליהודה בעל הגן ולקחו והביאו לפני ר' יהוש' בן פרחיה ולפני מרינוס זקן גדול של יהוד[ים] ולפני המון רב עם בני אדם.

ביום הזה בעשרים ושמונה לחודש אילול. ויקרב לבא בשוק פטלוס השר ויקרא ליהודה הפרדסי. ויקח אתו לפני יהושע בן פרחיה הנשיא. ויקרב אתו לפני מרינוס זקן שליהודה⁴⁵ ולפני קהלות בני האדם.

ביום ההוא בעשרים ושמונה לחדש אלול ויקרב לבוא בשוק פלטוס השר ויקרא ל[י]הודה הפרדסי ויקח אתו לפני רב יהושע בן רב פרחיה הנשיא [ויק]רב אתו לפני מרינוס זקן של יהודים ולפני קהלת חכמים זכ' לב'.

⁴⁵ Lege: שליהודים.

Heb4 [On the twenty-eighth] of Elul, [בעשרים ושמונה] לאלול עבר
 Pi[latus the governor?] passed [פילטוס ההגמון?] בשוק וקרא ...
 in the market and summoned [א] [בנ] ... [אדם].
 [... ...] [...p]eople.

JA1, Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 all agree that the proceedings began on the twenty-eighth of Elul, but the significance of this specific date is not clear. In some Jewish texts of late antiquity, the twenty-eighth of Elul is identified as the day when the sun and the moon were created; and in an apocalyptic Jewish text of the early Muslim period this is the date when the Messiah will emerge and fight the Arabs.⁴⁶ However, neither claim sheds any light on our text's dating of the beginning of Pilatus' investigation concerning Yeshu.

JA1, Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 also agree that the proceedings began with Pilatus summoning Yehudah the gardener, and all the Hebrew textual witnesses state that this occurred in the market (Heb1 has *בשוק המדינא*, probably reflecting an Aramaic expression like *בשוק(י) (ד)מדינתא*)⁴⁷—i.e., the streets of Tiberias, where Yeshu's dead body will be dragged towards the end of the narrative (see below, 8.9). In JA1, Pilatus summons Yehudah together with Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus the great elder and a group of elders in attendance, but in Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 he summons Yehudah and brings him

⁴⁶ See *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 8: בעשרים ושמונה באלול נבראו חמה ולבנה, and *Sefer Eliyahu* (Even-Shmuel 2017, 52): בעשרים ושמונה באלול יצא משיח: מהררי עולם, ינון שמו, ויעשה מלחמה עם הישמעאלים.

⁴⁷ The impact of the Aramaic original on Heb1's text is also visible in expressions such as *זה פילטוס* and *זקן גדול של יהוד[ים]*, and see our discussion of this textual witness in section II.1.9 of the Introduction.

to R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah, Marinus the great elder, and a crowd of people/Sages. On this last point, the texts are divided, with JA1 speaking of ‘a crowd of elders’ (which could also be translated as ‘Sages’) and Heb3 speaking of ‘a crowd of Sages’, whereas Heb1 and Heb2 speak of ‘crowds (or, a great multitude) of people’, and this probably was the reading of Heb4 as well. The Aramaic text behind these versions probably used the (Greek loanword) אַוּכְלוּסִין, ‘crowds’, which reappears later in the text (see below, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, and 9.3, and cf. our comments on 2.3). The identity of this crowd is not entirely clear, and in the one Aramaic textual witness where its identity is stated, there is a lacuna in the text (see Ar1 at 9.3). However, it seems quite clear that their recurrence in the narrative is due to the text’s desire to stress that there were many witnesses who saw what happened to Yeshu, and therefore saw that his followers’ claims were utterly unfounded, as is explicitly stated in 9.3.

The Greek word ὄχλος—in its singular or plural form—appears extremely often in the Gospel stories, and usually refers to the crowds who followed Jesus and who were astounded by his miracles and his teachings.⁴⁸ However, in some passages it refers to a crowd of Jesus’ persecutors.⁴⁹ In our text, the ὄχλοι are not directly involved in the unfolding of the narrative, but serve as witnesses to the veracity of the events it describes.

Throughout the narrative, three Jewish protagonists preside over the legal proceedings, namely, Yehudah the gardener,

⁴⁸ E.g., Matt. 4.25, 5.1, 7.28, 8.1, etc.

⁴⁹ E.g., Matt. 26.47, 55, 27.20, 24, etc.

Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah, and Marinus the elder. The first and third of these are virtually unknown in other ancient Jewish sources, but the second is known both from rabbinic literature and from the Babylonian incantation bowls of late-antique Mesopotamia. In rabbinic literature, Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah is described as one of the 'pairs' of Sages who were active at the early days of the rabbinic movement, in the second century BCE. Very few rulings and sayings are attributed to him, and very few stories are told about him, but one of these stories describes him as Yeshu's teacher, who unwittingly rejected his disciple and thus pushed him to become a heretic (bt San 107b and Sota 47a, cited above, in our comments on 0.12). Thus, both the Babylonian Talmud and our text see Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Yeshu as living at the same time, in spite of the chronological gap between them, with Yehoshu'a active in the late-second century BCE, and Jesus in the 30s of the first century CE. The association between these two figures may have been due to the similarity of their names, Yehoshu'a and Yeshu'a, but may also have been due to the fact that Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah was a figure about which very little was known. This also helps explain how the rabbis could think of Yehoshu'a as Yeshu's teacher, whereas our text thinks of him as Yeshu's main Jewish opponent, who leads the procedures against him together with Pilatus.

Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah is also mentioned in the Babylonian incantation bowls. These inscribed magical texts often include a reference to the *geṭ*, or deed of divorce, sent from the court-session (מִוֶּתֶב) of Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah in order to drive

demons away.⁵⁰ This may seem irrelevant for our text, but the stress on the court-session of this figure raises the possibility that in our text too the three Jewish protagonists were thought of as a court (*beit din*) of three, headed by Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah. Moreover, although Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah is ostensibly a rabbinic figure, he is in fact far more prominent in non-rabbinic texts such as *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and the Babylonian incantation bowls than he is in rabbinic literature itself.⁵¹ And although the bowls occasionally mention Jesus as well, they never imply any connection between these two historical figures.⁵²

With Yehudah the gardener, things are much more obscure. On the one hand, this figure is not mentioned in other ancient Jewish sources. On the other, the connection between the execution and burial of Jesus and a garden is very old. In the Gospel of John, we read that ‘in the place where he was crucified there was a garden’ (κῆπος), in which there was a new tomb, so Jesus was buried there.⁵³ We also read that when Mary Magdalene came there, and saw the empty tomb, Jesus came to her, but she thought at first he was the gardener (ὁ κηπουρός), and that this gardener had taken Jesus’ body away.⁵⁴ Moreover, as we shall note below (in our comments on 7.8), the claim that Jesus’ body was removed by a certain gardener (*hortulanus*) from his patch of

⁵⁰ See Shaked et al. (2013, 103–73).

⁵¹ See Ilan (2013).

⁵² For references to Jesus in the bowls, see Levene (1999), and Shaked (1999); additional bowls that refer to Jesus remain unpublished.

⁵³ John 19.41–42.

⁵⁴ John 20.15.

lettuces was recorded by Tertullian, writing c. 197 CE. Unfortunately, no name is given for this gardener, and there is no way of knowing why our narrative decided to call him Yehudah, except for the fact that this is the most ‘Jewish’ name that one could imagine.

The third figure is called in Heb1, מרינוס זקן גדול שליהודים, which is a literal translation of the Aramaic expression, מרינוס סבא רבא דיהודאי, a title that is attested in Ar1 later in the text (see below, 9.3, and cf. 6.3 and 6.13), and is also attested in Ibn Shaprut’s abridged text (see below, 6.3). A Rabbi Marinus is mentioned a few times in rabbinic literature (e.g., t Ṭohorot 7.7), but not much is known about him, and there is no indication that our narrative has him in mind. It is therefore not really clear how and why this originally–Latin name was chosen for one of Yeshu’s main opponents.

The connection between these three figures and Yeshu re-emerges in one of the medieval additions to the Hebrew *Sefer Yosippon*.⁵⁵ There, within a very garbled version of the story of Gaius Caligula’s attempt to place his statue in the Jerusalem Temple (an event that was described by both Philo and Josephus), the medieval Hebrew narrator embedded these four figures, together with Yehudah Iscarioti (who will appear in our own text

⁵⁵ For this passage, see already Lévi (1931). For the text, see Flusser (1980–1981, I:439–42). For an English translation, see Bowman (2022, 409–12). My understanding of this passage benefitted from an unpublished paper given by Saskia Dönitz at the Bern *Toledot Yeshu* conference in 2015, and cf. Dönitz (2013, 54–57).

below, 4.2). In this version of the story, it is Yeshu—who is presented as the son of the Jewish God—who incites the Roman emperor to force the Jews to recognise him (i.e., Gaius) as a god, whereas the Jewish king (who in some textual witnesses remains anonymous, and in others is identified either as Herod or as Agrippas) sends Yehoshu‘a and Yehuda and Marinus to Rome, to tell Caesar that they refuse to obey his orders. The emperor is furious, the Jews declare a three days’ fast (cf. the same practice in our own narrative, in 6.9), and with God’s intervention Gaius is slain and Claudius replaces him on the throne. Some of Yeshu’s followers are subsequently hung by the Jewish king, but some Jews are unhappy with this, since they expected the sinners to repent. The Jews then kill and stone more sinners in ‘Nazareth, the town of Edom’, but cannot extirpate them completely.

Reading such an account, we can be sure that its author had at least a passing familiarity with our text, for whereas Yehoshu‘a (presumably, ben Peraḥiah) and Yehudah (presumably, the gardener) appear in many other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, Marinus is found only in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. However, the decision to embed this scene in the reign of Caligula, Tiberius’ successor, and in the story of Caligula’s attempt to place his statue in the Jerusalem Temple, probably means that this anonymous author had only a very vague familiarity with our text, and with other *Toledot Yeshu* texts, and thus developed his own scenario for the birth and growth of Christianity. As this scenario is not found in the main text of the Hebrew *Yosippon*, or in its Arabic version, and is only found in late medieval manuscripts, it seems clear that this is a late addition to the *Yosippon*. While it requires

further study, such a study probably will not add much to our knowledge of *Gzar-dina de-Yesu*.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For the Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic versions of the Yosippon, see Sela, (2009, esp. I:258–59 and II:480).

2.0. Pilatus and Yehudah the Gardener

After providing its readers the basic facts about the culprit and the investigators, and when and where the proceedings took place, our narrative moves to the investigation itself. To find out more about Yeshu and his crimes, Pilatus questions Yehudah the gardener, and has Yeshu brought to him for interrogation.

2.1. Pilatus and Yehudah the Gardener: Pilatus Questioning Yehudah

Textual witnesses: JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| JA1 | And Pelatus the governor said to Yehudah the gardener: "We received word of a man called Yeshu. He is misleading the people with magic. Do you know him?" | פקאל פלטוס אלקאיד ליהודה אלגנאן קד אתצל בנא כבר רגל יוקאל לה ישו הודא יצל אלנאס באלסחר הל תערפה. |
| Heb1 | And they asked Yehudah, the owner of the garden, and they said to him: "A certain man whose name is Yeshu rose and is misleading the world; do you know him in truth?" | ושאלו ליהודה בעל הגן ואמרו לו איש אחד ושמו ישו קם ומתעה העולם הידעת אותו באמת. |
| Heb2 | And they asked this Yehudah, and they said to him: "A certain man whose name is Yeshu'a, and he is misleading the people of (the) world with a deed of magic—do you know him?" | וישאלו לזה יהודה ויאמרו לו איש אחד ושמו ישוע והוא מתעה את אנשי עולם במעשה הכשפים. התדע אתו. |

- Heb3 And they asked this Yehudah, וישאלו לזה יהודה ויאמרו לו אחד
and they said to him: “One ושמו ישוע הוא מתעה אנשי העולם
whose name is Yeshu‘a, and he במעשה המכשפים התדע אותו.
is misleading the people of the
world with a deed of magic—
do you know him?”
- Heb4 And they asked Yehudah [the ושאלו ליהודה [גננה ואמרו] לו איש
gardener and they said] to him: אחד שמו ישוע [קם ומ]תעה העולם
“A certain man whose name is [אותו] בקסמים הידעת
Yeshu [rose and is mi]sleading
the world with sorcery—do you
know [him]?”

Whereas JA1 has Pilatus questioning Yehudah, in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4 it is ‘they’—presumably, Pilatus, Yehoshu‘a and Marinus—who question him; moreover, in JA1, Pilatus opens his question by saying that he had received word, or a report, about Yeshu, which is absent in the other textual witnesses. The question itself is nearly identical in all the textual witnesses, except that JA1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4 make an explicit reference to Yeshu’s use of magic. Heb1 does not, and additionally Heb1, and perhaps also Heb4, add ‘in truth’ (or ‘truly’) at the end of the question.

The accusation that Jesus was practising magic is extremely old, and may go back to his own lifetime.¹ It is based on four

¹ The literature on this issue is vast; see the classic, and very problematic, discussion by Smith (1978), and the very sober analysis by Garrett (1989); see further Stanton (1994, reprinted in Stanton 2004, 127–47); Swartz (2012, reprinted in Swartz 2018, 71–88). For the discourse of magic in our text see Di Segni (1985, 143–61); Bammel (1997a); Bohak (2020).

related assumptions. First, that the miracles he performed, and the stories about them, were a major source of attraction for those who followed him, both in his lifetime and after his death.² In our narrative, this is made clear in a subsequent passage, where Yeshu is explicitly described as misleading the people with his supposed miracles (see below, 2.3). It is also implied in the Talmudic claim that Yeshu ‘practised magic, and incited and misled the Jews (into idolatry)’ (בישף והסית והדיח את ישראל).³ Celsus, the second-century anti-Christian polemicist, stated that Jesus ‘tried his hand at certain magical powers ... and on account of them gave himself the title of God’; but Celsus shows no real interest in the stories about Jesus’ miracles, as we shall soon see.⁴

A second assumption that underlies this accusation is that Yeshu really did perform some of the miracles reported in the Gospels, and presumably in oral traditions as well. This is an important point, since it means that rather than denying that he performed any miracles, his opponents admitted the veracity of his miracles, but claimed that they were based on illegitimate magical practices.⁵ In our own narrative, this becomes clear when Yeshu miraculously makes Tiberinus’ daughter pregnant, even

² This is repeatedly stated by the Gospels themselves, and see, for example, Mark 1.27–28, 32–34, 45; 3.7–10, etc.

³ See *bt San* 43a and 107b, and *bt Sot* 47a. For the specific meaning of *הסית* and *הדיח*, see *m San* 7.10 and *Deut.* 13.7–19.

⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28 and 1.38 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 28 and 37).

⁵ This was a common tactic in antiquity, and see Dodds (1965, 124–26); Garrett (1989); Stratton (2007, 107–41).

though she never had sexual intercourse with a man (see below, 6.7), as well as when he flies in the air, locks a cave's opening from the inside, and turns himself into a bird (see below, 7.2, 7.5, and 7.7). In rabbinic literature, we find stories about healing the sick in the name of Yeshu ben Pandera, and from these stories it is clear that this mode of treatment was deemed by the rabbis to be effective, but strictly forbidden.⁶ Celsus is much more circumspect on this point, saying that 'it was by magic that he was able to do the miracles which he *appeared* to have done' (γοητεία δυνηθέντος ἃ ἔδοξε παράδοξα πεποιηκέναι), thus stopping short of admitting the veracity of Jesus' miracles.⁷ And the Qur'an reports the miracles of Jesus as facts, and has Allah saying to Jesus on Judgment Day that "I prevented the children of Israel from harming you when you came to them with clear proofs (بِالْبَيِّنَات) and the disbelievers among them said, 'This is nothing but pure magic' (سِحْرٌ مُّبِين)."⁸ This probably reflects the older Jewish accusation that Jesus was just a magician, but is also a part of the Qur'an's own awareness of the tendency of a prophet's opponents to denigrate his actions as 'magic'.⁹

⁶ See t Hull 2.22–23 (Zuckerman 1970, 503); pt AZ 2.2 (40d); pt Shab 14.4 (14d); Eccl.R. 10.5 (Kiperwasser 2021, 262), with Geller (1977); Reiner (2004, 366–71); Schäfer (2007, 52–62).

⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.6 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 10; emphasis mine).

⁸ See Qur'an 5.110 and 61.6.

⁹ See, for example, Qur'an 10.2 and 74.24 (accusations that Muhammad was a magician), and Qur'an 10.76 and 27.13 (accusations that Moses was a magician), with Zadeh (2015, 238–40).

The accusation of magic was well known to early Christian writers, who often noted that the Jews describe Jesus as a mere magician.¹⁰ It is also attested in rabbinic literature, where Jesus is said to have practised magic (see above), and reappears in many later Jewish texts.¹¹ The same accusation is rehearsed by al-Jāhiz, when he claims that the Jews, “say that he was a master of spells and magic rituals (صاحب رُقَى ونيرنجات),¹² a healer of demoniacs (مُداوى مجانين), a quack (متطبب), a master of tricks (صاحب حيل), a trainer of deceptions (مريّص خدع) and the reading of books (قراءة كتب).”¹³ Notably, it is rehearsed at about the same time, but thousands of kilometres away, by Agobard of Lyons in his summary of the Jewish polemics against Jesus, when he says that they relate how Jesus was executed ‘like a despicable magician’ (*ueluti magum detestabilem*).¹⁴

¹⁰ See, for example, Justin, *Dialogue* 69.7 (cited above, in our comments on 1.1), and cf. his *First Apology* 30; for later Christian writers see, for example, the third-century Christian poet Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum* (or, *Carmen de duobus populis*) 384 and 387, who says that the Jews ‘defame (Jesus) as a magician’ (*magum infamant*). This Jewish accusation is also attested in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* 43.3–4, in the *Acta Pilati* (Tischendorf 1853, 208 and 214), in the *Letter of Pilate to Claudius* (see Ehrman and Pleše 2014, 278), in the *Lament of the Virgin* (see our comments on 8.10 below), and in many other texts.

¹¹ See, for example, Nemoy (1930, 364).

¹² For the second term, see Burnett (2008). The attribution of *niranjat* to Jesus recurs in *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, and see Lasker and Stroumsa (1996, I:70 and 155).

¹³ See Finkel (1926, 23).

¹⁴ See Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206), with Schäfer (2011, 33).

A third assumption that underlies the connection of Yeshu with magic is that such miracles as his can be achieved by magicians whose powers derive from the technical magical knowledge that they have acquired. This is a common assumption in late antiquity and is shared by our narrative, as well as by rabbinic literature (which has much to say about magicians and their magic), by many early Christian writers (who certainly did not think of Jesus himself as a magician), and by the ‘pagan’ writers of late antiquity.¹⁵

The fourth assumption that underlies our narrative is that magic can be learned from *written* books. This is an assumption to which we shall return below, in our comments on 3.6.

2.2. Pilatus and Yehudah the Gardener: Yehudah’s Response

Textual witnesses: JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	And he (Yehudah) said to him: “Yes, I know him.” And he (Pilatus) said to him: “Where is he from?”. And he (Yehudah) said to him: “From a town called Nazareth.” And he (Pilatus) ordered him to bring the man.	פקאל לה נעם אנא עארף בה פקאל להו מן א״ן ה״ו פקאל להו מן מדינה אסמהא נאצרה פאמרה באחצא <ר> אלרגל.
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¹⁵ For the widespread belief in late antiquity in the power of magic and magicians, see Dickie (2001, 202–21); Collins (2008, 132–65); Bohak (2008, 35–51).

- Heb1 He said to them: "I know him." אמר להם ידעתי אותו. ענו לו [ו]ומאין
They answered him: "And הוא אמר להם מנצרת מדינתו¹⁶ הוא.
where is he from?". He said to ועוס[ק] באחיות עיניים ובכשפניות
them: "He is from the town of ומתעה לבריות. כי יש לו ספרים
Nazareth, and he deals with מחרטמי מצ' ובהן עוסק תמ[יד] עתה
trickery and magic, and he אם תרצו אלך ואביאו. ואמר[]
misleads human beings, since
he has books from the wizards
of Egypt, and he is always busy
with them. Now, if you (pl.)
wish, I will go and bring him."
And he (or, they) said [].
- Heb2 And he said to them: "Yes, I ויאמר להם הן ידעתי אתו כי מתעה
know him (and) that he is לאנשים הוא. והוא בכתבים¹⁷ וגם
misleading people, and he is in מתעה אנשי עולם. ומצאנו בידו זה
magic, and also misleads the המעשה, ויבחר שש¹⁸ מקום והוא
people of the world. And we מתעה אנשי עולם במדינה אחת.
discovered in his hand this עתה אם ירצה אדוני אלך ואביא אתו
deed, and he chose a place ואשלמהו אליכם.
there, and he is misleading the
people of the world in a certain
town. Now, if my master
wishes I will go and bring him
and deliver him to you."
- Heb3 And he said to them: "Yes, I ויאמר להם הן ידעתי כי הוא מתעה
know that he is misleading לאנשים והוא תועה בכשפים וגם

¹⁶ Lege: המדינה. The form מדינתו reflects the Aramaic מדינתה in the text from which Heb1 was translated.

¹⁷ Lege: בכשפים. A word like תועה probably was omitted from the text, and cf. Heb3.

¹⁸ Lege: שם.

מתעה אנשי עולם¹⁹ במדינה אחת.
 עתה אם ירצה אֲדני אלך ואביא אתו.
 people, and he is misled by
 magic, and also misleads the
 people of the world in a certain
 town. Now, if my master
 wishes I will go and bring
 him.”

Heb4 And he said: “Yes I know him.” אִם [...] אמר לו
 He said to him: “[Bring him [...]
 here (?)].”

Yehudah’s answer diverges widely between the textual witnesses. All agree that Yehudah answers that he does know Yeshu, but in Heb2/Heb3 Yehudah goes on with his explanations, whereas in JA1 and Heb4 Pilatus asks a follow-up question, which is asked by all those present in Heb1. The question, about Yeshu’s place of origin, is preserved in JA1 and Heb1, but Yehudah’s answer is different in each textual witness. In JA1 he merely answers the question, by saying that Yeshu is from Nazareth, but in Heb1 he adds to this statement a detailed description of Yeshu’s evil deeds (and note the verbatim repetition of phrases from 0.8), including the books of magic that will be the topic of the next major scene. Heb2/Heb3 also describe Yeshu’s actions, but in a rather garbled manner, and without referring to his hometown; however, it is quite likely that Heb2/Heb3’s במדינה אחת is a miscopying of בנצרת מדינתא, which would reflect the Aramaic text’s במדינת נצרת.

At the end of this scene, JA1 has Pilatus ordering Yehudah to bring Yeshu to him, whereas Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 have Ye-

¹⁹ It seems as if the text of Heb3 was shaped by a parablepsis from the first מתעה אנשי עולם to the second.

hudah suggesting that he will bring Yeshu; in Heb1, Pilatus probably agrees. And if ואשלמהו in Heb2 is not a scribal error for ואשלחהו, 'and I will send him', then it would seem to reflect the Aramaic verb שלם in *af^{el}*, 'to hand over', which may have been there in the text that Heb2 was translating. Heb3 probably did not understand this phrase, and simply omitted it.

2.3. Pilatus and Yehudah the Gardener: Yehudah Finds Yeshu and Brings Him to Pilatus

Textual witnesses: JA1, JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	Yehudah went with a crowd to bring Yeshu to the governor's court. And they found him sitting with a great crowd around him including sick persons and cripples, whom he was claiming to heal. And they brought him to the governor and to (Marinus) the elder.	פמצא יהודה ומעה גמאעה ליחצרו ישו מגלס אלקאי <ד> פלחקה גאלס וחואליה גמאעה כבירה ופיהא מרצא ומעלולין ידעי אנה יבריהם פאחצרוה אלי אלקא [יד] ואלי אלשיך.
JA3	[... ...] and he brought him before them.	[... ...] ואתי בה >ב[י]ן [י]דיהם<.
Heb1	Then Yehudah went, with people, and they found him (i.e., Yeshu) sitting, with many people before him. And when he came before them they stood up and they bowed down. And Yeshu said to them: "I am the son of God." Yehudah then spat spittle in the face and	אז הלך יהודה ואנשים עמו ומצאוהו יושב ולפניו עם רב וכבא ²⁰ לפניו עמדו וישתחוו ויאמ' להן יישו בן אלהים אני ויהודה אז ירק {תד} רוק בפניו ובפיו של יישו, וגזר ותפשוהו וקשרו ידיו לאחריו והביאוהו לפני ר' יהוש' ולפני כל שולחיו.

²⁰ Lege: וכשבא.

mouth of Yeshu; and he decreed and they caught him and tied his hands behind him, and they brought him before R. Yehoshu'a and before all those who had sent him (i.e., Yehudah).

Heb2 Yehudah the orchard-man went and found him with many people sitting in front of him, and he was saying to them that "I will heal you." And he said to them: "I am God." And they were bowing down to him. And Yehudah the orchard-man caught him and came with him before them.

Heb3 ...with people sitting in front of him, and he was saying to them that "I will heal you, and I will raise the dead and open the eyes of the blind." And he also said to them: "I am God." And they were bowing down to him. And Yehudah the orchard-

וילך יהודה הפרדסי וימצא אמו²¹ ואשים²² רבים יושבים לפניו והוא אומר להם כי {ידעתי} אני ארפא אתכם. והוא²³ להם אני אלוה והמה משתחווים לו. ויתפוס את²⁴ יהודה הפרדסי ויבוא אתו לפניהם.

...ואנשים יושבים לפניו והוא היה ואמר²⁵ להם כי אני ארפא אתכם ואני אחיה מתים ואפתח עיני סומים ועוד אמר להם אלוה אני והמה משתחווים לו ויתפוס אתו יהודה הפרדסי ויביא אתו לפניהם.

²¹ Lege: אותו, or אותו.

²² Lege: ואנשים.

²³ Lege: והוא אומר.

²⁴ Lege: אתו.

²⁵ A few words were omitted from the text here.

²⁶ Lege: אומר.

man caught him and brought
him before them.

Heb4 [Yehudah] the gardener went, [with] people [] Yeshu and many people [], and he (i.e., Yeshu) was demonstrating (?) to them [] to him, for he told them [] came this Yehudah the gardener [and br]ought him before them.	[הֵלֵךְ ²⁷ גִּנְנָה וְאֲנָשִׁים] [יֵשׁוּ וְאֲנָשִׁים הִרְבָּה] וְהוּא מוֹכֵת ²⁸ לָהֶם] לֹא כִי אֲמַר לָהֶם] בְּאֵזֶּה יְהוּדָה גִּנְנָה] וְהָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם.
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All the textual witnesses agree that Yehudah found Yeshu in front of a crowd—and in this case, the Aramaic texts *may* have used the word אוֹכְלוֹסִין to describe Yeshu’s followers—and that he was busy extolling his own powers. In JA1, he merely claims that he can heal the sick and the cripple, who therefore flock to him. In Heb1, his followers bow down to him, and he claims to be the son of God, as he already did in the introductory interpolation, for which see above, 0.13, and as he will do again in 8.5. And in Heb2/Heb3 he promises to heal his followers, and says that he is God, and his followers then bow down to him. Heb3 provides further details, with Yeshu claiming that he can raise the dead and make the blind see. Heb4 is poorly preserved, and it is not clear what Yeshu is claiming in this version.

Yeshu’s claim that he is the son of God probably was there in the Aramaic text(s), since in 6.5 both Yeshu and Yoḥanan describe themselves as ‘sons of God’ in the Aramaic textual witnesses, whereas JA1 makes them ‘friends’ of God. Thus, it seems

²⁷ The name יהודה was omitted from the text here.

²⁸ Lege: מוכיח or מופת, with one or more words missing before it (?).

likely that here too JA1 omitted Yeshu's claim to be the son of God, reflecting its own theological sensitivity on this score.²⁹

Heb1 is alone in depicting Yehudah as spitting in Yeshu's face and mouth, but this is no random textual variant. Later in the narrative, when Yeshu makes the king's daughter pregnant, Heb1 says that Yeshu *ונתעברה בפי'ה ורק רוק*, 'spat spittle in her mouth, and she became pregnant', and a similar statement is made in Heb5 (see below, 6.7). And there too, the other textual witnesses do not include this detail. As we shall note below (in our comments on 6.7), the Gospels describe Jesus' use of his own spittle when performing some healings, and Heb1 probably reflects a familiarity with such stories, and in this scene has Yehudah doing the same thing to Yeshu—but mainly as a sign of contempt.³⁰ Heb1 also is alone in having Yehudah's men tie Yeshu's hands, but JA1, Heb1, and Heb2/Heb3 all agree that Yehudah (and his men) bring Yeshu to Pilatus and his fellow-investigators, as he had promised to do. This probably was stated in JA3 as well, but only a small part of the description is extant.

²⁹ For this theological sensitivity, see our description of JA1 in section II.1.6 of the Introduction.

³⁰ In some of the texts of the 'Helena' recension, all the Jews spit at Yeshu's face, but this occurs at a much later stage of the narrative; see, for example, Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:164).

3.0. Pilatus and Yeshu

Once Yeshu is brought before Pilatus, the interrogation begins. First the technicalities—the identity of the suspected culprit, including his origins, his ancestry, and his profession—and then the charges against him, and his response to these charges.

3.1. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Origins

Textual witnesses: JA1, JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	They asked him about his ancestry and about his profession, and he informed them that he was the son of [Yoḥanan? the] Dyer (?).	וסאלוה ען נסלה תם ען צנעתה. פערפהם אנה כאן אבן[אל] צבאג
JA3	[... ... they sa]id: “What is your nation?” He said: “[I am a Jew?], but I am a child of fornication.”	[... קאל] ו איש חזבד. קאל ... [... וליכנני ולד זנא.
Heb1	They said to Yeshu: “Where are you from? what is your profession?” He answered: “I am the son of Jews, but a <i>mamzer</i> .”	אמרו לו לישו מאין אתה מה מלאכתך. השיב בן יהודים אני אלא ממזר.
Heb2	They asked Yeshu‘a the wicked, and they said to him: “From which nation/place (?) are	וישאלו את ישוע הרשע ויאמרו לו מאין זהמין (?) אתה ויאמר אליהם יהודי אנוכי וגם ממזר אני.

¹ Lege: מאי זה מין? Note the use of מין for ‘nation’ in some Aramaic dialects (e.g., Sokoloff 2014, 221); however, it could also be an error for מאי זה (מקום), ‘from which place’. Both options are supported by Heb3.

you?” And he said to them: “I
am a Jew, and I am also a
mamzer.”

Heb3 They asked Yeshu‘a the wicked, וישאלו את ישוע הרשע ויאמרו לו
and they said to him: “From מאיזה מקום אתה ומאיזה אומה
which place are you, and from ויאמר להם יהודי אנכי וגם ממזר אני
which nation?” And he said to
them: “I am a Jew, and I am
also a *mamzer*.”

Heb4 They answered: “[...] your והשיבו [...] מְשֻׁפָּחֶתֶד. השיב
family?” [Yeshu] answered [ישו ואמר יהודי אני אלא ממזר
[and said]: “I am a [Je]w, but a
mamzer.”

The textual witnesses diverge on the exact question Yeshu was asked, but all agree that he was asked about his origins, whether in regards to his ancestry, his place of origin, or his nationality. JA1 and Heb1 also add a question regarding his profession, but this is an issue that will be dealt with later in the text (see below, 3.5).

Yeshu’s answer in JA1 is unusual, in that it seems to refer to Yoḥanan the Dyer; if the text indeed had Yeshu saying that Yoḥanan was his father, this would be inconsistent with JA1’s later reference to Yoḥanan the Dyer as Yeshu’s teacher (below, 3.8). However, in this version, the subsequent passages—which discuss Yeshu’s parents and his own name and profession—have been omitted.² It therefore seems likely that the translator, or a reviser, of the Judaeo-Arabic text decided to skip the entire

² The manuscript displays a gap after אַל[אֵל] צָבִיא, signifying that this is the end of one scene, and the next passage in JA1 is 3.6, which deals with the books of magic used by Yeshu.

discussion about Yeshu's ancestry, including the claim that he was a *mamzer*, and fill the resulting lacuna by claiming that Yoḥanan was his father.³ Alternatively, he was planning to write that Yeshu was the son of יוסף אלנגאר, 'Yoseph the carpenter', as we will see in some of the other textual witnesses in 3.4. In such a case, the reference to אֶלְצָבָאג [אֶל] is just a scribal error.⁴

Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4 all have Yeshu claiming that he is a Jew, but a *mamzer*, and the same text probably is reflected in JA3, where Yeshu says that he is [a Jew], but a וְלִד זָנָא, 'a child (born) of fornication'. This is one of the meanings of the word *mamzer*, and the term וְלִד זָנָא is of great importance in Islamic jurisprudence, which probably influenced JA3's translator when he incorporated it here.⁵ However, in this case it might be a misleading translation. The *halakhic* definition of a *mamzer* is the offspring of any union which according to biblical law is liable to extirpation.⁶ Thus, if Yeshu's mother was married, and

³ Note that in many 'Helena' texts, including those in Judaeo-Arabic (e.g., New York, JTS ENA NS 32.5, Cambridge, T-S NS 298.57, and St. Petersburg, RNL Evr.-Arab. II:1993), Yeshu's mother is married, or betrothed, to a man named Yoḥanan, or impregnated by a man with that name (see Goldstein 2023, 53–55, 115–18, 124–31, 181–89). Thus, a translator or copyist of JA1 may have thought that Yeshu was Yoḥanan's son, and confused him with Yoḥanan the Dyer.

⁴ A third possibility is that many words were omitted from the text here, and that אֶלְצָבָאג [אֶל] is in fact the word צִיאָד which should have appeared at the end of 3.5.

⁵ See Kohlberg (1985).

⁶ See m Yev 4.13.

committed adultery, Yeshu would indeed be a *mamzer*.⁷ But here the issue probably is that Yeshu was the son of a Jewish woman and a Gentile man (as will be made clear in the following passage). In rabbinic literature, we find the claim that the child born of such a union is a *mamzer*—a claim that is eventually rejected as a minority view, but is still attested in rabbinic discussions of the amoraic period.⁸

The claim that Jesus was a *mamzer* is attested in an early *piyyut*, לתליל, התומכים ממזר, ‘Those who support a *mamzer* as an idol’, that was included by Menahem Zulay among the poems perhaps written by Yannai (fifth or sixth century), as it was written in imitation of another anti-Christian *piyyut* that Zulay attributed to him.⁹ Regardless of who wrote this *piyyut*, the claim

⁷ For the possibility that the label *mamzer* was applied to Jesus already in his lifetime see Chilton (2000 and 2006); McKnight (2003); and cf. Meerson (2016).

⁸ See t Kidd 4.16 (Lieberman 1973a, 292): גוי ועבד הבאו על בת ישראל, והולידה בן הולד ממזר, ‘A Gentile and a slave who had sexual union with a Jewish woman and she gave birth to a son—the child is a *mamzer*’. See also pt Kidd 3.12 (64c), bt Yev 45a and 70a, and bt AZ 59a, where the view that the child of a Jewish woman and a Gentile man is a Jew, but a *mamzer*, is attributed to several different Sages (and cf. bt Yev 99a and bt Kidd 70a and 75a-b). See further Francus (1988, 98–103); Katzoff (2003, 282–84). I am grateful to Yedidah Koren for discussing this issue with me.

⁹ See Zulay (1938, 339 and 382). The first *piyyut* was re-edited by Rabinovitz (1985–1987, II:220–23), and was discussed by van Bakkum (1993, 306–7). For a brief discussion and translation of both *piyyutim*, see Rand (2013, 1–4 and 14–16).

that a *mamzer* was turned into an idol is an unmistakable reference to Jesus, and joins other anti-Christian references in this *piyyut*, as we shall see below, in our comments on 3.8 and 8.3.

The claim that Yeshu was a *mamzer* may also have given rise to the reference in a *piyyut* for Purim attributed to Eleazar ha-Qallir (early-seventh century) to Haman as ‘the *mamzer*, when he was hung/crucified on a pole, to be pierced in front of his ten sons’ (ממזר בנתלה על קורה מול עשרת בניו להדקרה), as the parallels between Jesus and Haman are a recurrent theme in Jewish lore in late antiquity.¹⁰ And this claim may even have been heard—and misunderstood—by Amulo, who says that the Jews call Jesus ‘*Ussum Hamizri*, which means the Egyptian destroyer (*dissipator Aegyptius*)’.¹¹ ‘*Mitzri*’ (מצרי) is the Hebrew word for ‘Egyptian’, but it is not clear how ‘*ussum*’ could be a Hebrew or an Aramaic word for ‘destroyer’. It is therefore quite possible that what Amulo heard was that the Jews were calling Jesus ‘Yeshu *ha-mamzer*’, or ‘Yeshu *mamzera*’, i.e., ‘Jesus the *mamzer*’, which he slightly misheard and subsequently misinterpreted. Earlier in his text, Amulo cited the famous passage from Jerome’s commentary on Isa. 8.14,

¹⁰ For this *piyyut*, see T-S H 12.24, and the edition by Bernstein (1964, 501), and by Hachohen (1997, 57). For doubts about the attribution to the Qallir, see Hachohen (1997, 119–26). For the parallels between Haman and Jesus see below, our comments on 7.8.

¹¹ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 39 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 76). For the many attempts to explain this unusual claim see Horbury (1971, 451–55).

in which the name of Shammai, one of the forefathers of the rabbinic movement, is etymologised as *dissipator*, an etymology that may have led to some confusion on his part.¹²

The claim that Yeshu was a *mamzer* reappears in a *piyyut* by Yosef Ibn Avitur (tenth or eleventh century), who characterises the Christians as those who ‘name as God a *mamzer* and the son of a menstruant woman’ (הקוראים אלוה ממזר ובן נידה), this being the first attested reference to Jesus as the son of a menstruant woman.¹³ This claim is amply attested in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, but not in our text. And Maimonides, in the twelfth century, knows the claim that Jesus was a *mamzer*, but says that it is *halakhically* inaccurate, since his mother was Jewish and his father was a Gentile, and the *halakha* determines that the offspring of such a union is not a *mamzer*.¹⁴ The possibility that according to other *halakhic*—or popular—views such an offspring would be considered a *mamzer* was of no interest to Maimonides.

To sum up: The word ממזר probably was found in the Aramaic texts translated by the different versions, and is a keyword in the text of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, since it points to Yeshu’s Gentile

¹² See Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 8 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 14).

¹³ See Rand (2013, 7 and 11).

¹⁴ See Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen* (Kafih 1972, 21): ישוע הנצרי שחיק עצמות והו מן ישראל, ואנה ואן כאן אבזה גוי ואמה ישראלית פהו מן ישראל, לאן אלאצל ענדנא גוי ועבד הבא על בת ישראל הולד כשר, ואנמא נסמיה ממזר עלי ג'ה' אלמבאלגה, ‘Yeshu’a the Nazarene, may his bones be ground, was a Jew, for although his father was a Gentile, his mother was a Jew, so he was a Jew, for the rule with us is “A Gentile or a slave who have sexual union with a Jewish woman—the offspring is legitimate” (bt Yev 45a and Kidd 68b), but we call him *mamzer* by way of exaggeration.’

father, Pandera (on whom more below). Moreover, it is this word which encouraged the development of the later stories of how Yeshu was conceived in an act of fornication, or rape, by a man who was not his mother's husband. This story is found in most of the 'Helena' texts of *Toledot Yeshu*, and it was also included in the introductory interpolation in Heb1 (see above, 0.3–0.4 and 0.11–0.12), even though it contradicts what we learn in the current passage about Yeshu's ancestry.¹⁵ And the claim that Jesus was a *mamzer* resurfaces in many other strands of late-antique and medieval Jewish literature, and is often augmented by the claim that he was the son of a menstruant woman (בן הנידה).¹⁶ This detail probably was based on a conflation of the claim that he was a *mamzer* with a story about a disrespectful disciple that is found in the 'minor tractates' *Kallah* and *Kallah Rabbati*, in which the rabbis detect that a certain disciple is both a *mamzer* and the son of a menstruant woman.¹⁷ And the application of both epithets to Jesus, an application which is common in the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, is first attested in the tenth or eleventh century, in a *piyyut* by Yosef Ibn Avitur.

¹⁵ See Deutsch (2000, 182); Gager and Ahuvia (2013); Goldstein (2020).

¹⁶ See, for example, Rand (2013); Lasker and Stroumsa (1996, I:121, 170; Jesus as a *mamzer*, and as a son of Pandera). For *ben ha-nida*, see also Marienberg (2003, 159–213).

¹⁷ See *Kallah* 16 and *Kallah Rabbati* 2.2, in Higger (1936, 146–49 and 190–93).

3.2. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Father

Textual witnesses: JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4¹⁸ (this passage is omitted in JA1)

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| JA3 | [They said: “What is the name of] your father?” He said: “His name is Pandera and he is a foreigner.” | [קאלו איש אסם א] בוך קאל אסמה פנדירא והוא אנגבי |
| Heb1 | They said to him: “What is the name of your father?” He said to them: “Pandera, and he is a Gentile.” They said to him: “And what is his trade?” He said to them: “He is a wood carver.” | א"ל מה שם ¹⁹ אביך. א"ל פנדירא, וארמאי הוא. א"ל ומה אומנותיו. א"ל חרש עצים הוא. |
| Heb2 | “And your father too—what was his name, and what was he doing?” He said to them: “My father’s name is Pandera, and he is a Gentile in Israel, and he is a man who plays.” | וגם אביך מה היה שמו ומה מעשהו ויאמר להם אבי פנדרא שמו והוא נכרי מישראל, ואיש מנגן הוא. |
| Heb3 | They said to him: “Your father—what was his name, and what were his deeds and his profession?” He said to | ויאמרו לו אביך מה היה שמו ומה מעשיו ומלאכתו ויאמר להם אבי פנדירא שמו ואיש נכרי בישר נכרי בישראל ²⁰ ואיש מנגן היה |

¹⁸ In Heb4, a large lacuna in the folio left only broken remnants of letters at this point.

¹⁹ The word שם was highlighted by the scribe, in the same manner in which he highlighted the word השם (‘the Name’, i.e., God) elsewhere in his text (see above, 0.11); here, the highlighting is due to scribal error.

²⁰ A dittography.

them: “My father’s name is
Pandera, and (he is) a Gentile
person in Israel, and he was a
man who plays.”

Heb4 [... ...]

[... ...]

All the textual witnesses agree that Yeshu’s father was Pandera, and that he was a Gentile. Heb1’s claim that he was an ארמאי reflects the Aramaic word ארמאי or ארמאה, i.e., ‘an Aramean’, which is the common designation for a Gentile person in Jewish texts of late antiquity.²¹ Heb2/Heb3 also claim that Yeshu’s father was a man who plays—presumably, playing a musical instrument. This error must be due to a confusion between (Aramaic and Hebrew) נגר, ‘carpenter’ and Hebrew נגן, ‘player’. Heb1 states that he was a חרש עצים, a biblical term meaning ‘wood carver’ (see Isa. 44.13), and cf. our discussion below of חרש as applied to Yeshu’s grandfather or stepfather in 3.4.²²

The claim that Jesus’ real father was called Pandera is extremely old, and was well known to Celsus, writing in the 170s

²¹ See Sokoloff (2017, 53; ‘Aramean, gentile’), and Sokoloff (2020, 104), whose translation, ‘pagan’, is too specific, since any non-Jew may be covered by this term, as the examples he adduces demonstrate, and see, for example, m San 9.6: הבועל ארמית, ‘one who has intercourse with a Gentile woman’, or m Meg 4.9, with Stern (1994, 17–18).

²² The claim that Yeshu’s real father was a חרש עצים is found in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, and see, for example, MS Jerusalem, Benayahu B 25 (#43794), fol. 35r, MS Sassoon 793 (#9074), page 359, and MS Jerusalem, NLI Heb. 8°864 (#B 43 (8°864)), fol. 81r (in the last two manuscripts, the reading is חורש עצים), with Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:127).

CE.²³ According to him, Jesus' mother 'was turned out by the carpenter (ἀπὸ τοῦ... τέκτονος) who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera' (ἀπὸ τινος στρατιώτου Πανθήρα τοῦνομα). Celsus does not state that this Panthera was not a Jew, but since he was a Roman soldier, it is quite clear that he was a Gentile. In later Christian literature, Panther is sometimes found as one of Jesus' forefathers, thus proving the longevity of this tradition.²⁴ One interesting example is found in the seventh-century *Teaching of Jacob, the Newly-Baptised*, where a senior Jewish Torah-teacher from Tiberias (μέγας νομοδιδάσκαλος Τιβεριάδος) is reported to have provided a long explanation about Jesus' genealogy, including the claim that Mary's paternal grandfather was called Panther.²⁵

The claim that Jesus' real father was Pandera is also attested in rabbinic literature (although it never states that Pandera was not a Jew), and it is quite likely that many Jews—and even non-Jews—in late antiquity knew Jesus by his derogatory appellation 'Yeshu ben Pandera'.²⁶ In the ninth century, Amulo states

²³ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.32 and cf. 1.69, with Chadwick (1965, 31, no. 3). In what follows, I cite Chadwick's translation.

²⁴ For Panther as one of Jesus' ancestors, see Epiphanius, *Panar.* 58 (= 78) (Holl 1915–1933, III:457), and the sources adduced by Murcia (2014b, 170–83) and Zeichmann (2020, 143).

²⁵ See *Doctr. Jacobi* 42, in Bonwetsch (1910, 41–42), and Déroche (1991, 132–35).

²⁶ See, for example, t Hull 2.22–23 (Zuckermann 1970, 503); bt Shab 104b; bt San 67a; Eccl. R. 1.8 (Hirshman 2016, 72), with Rokeaḥ (1970). For non-Jewish sources, see, for example, Langlois (1869, 191 and 195), and de Menasce (1945, 210–11, 222).

that the Jews claim that Jesus was ‘an impious man, and the son of an impious man, namely, of a certain pagan whom they call Pandera (*nescio cuius ethnici, quem nominant Pandera*), with whom they say the mother of the Lord committed adultery’.²⁷ Finally, in medieval Jewish literature, ‘ben Pandera’ is a common appellation for Jesus.²⁸ And as we have seen in our comments on the previous passage, Maimonides was well aware of the claim that Jesus’ father was a Gentile; whether he had some direct or indirect access to our text, or simply deduced it from Pandera’s name, is not clear, but elsewhere in his writings he displays no familiarity with our text.

3.3. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Mother

Textual witnesses: JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in JA1)

JA3 “And what is the name of your mother?” He said: “Her name is Miriam.” “And what is her profession?” He said: “Hair-dresser.”

ואיש אסם אמך קאל אסמהא מרים
ואיש צנעתהא קאל <מאשט״ה>.

Heb1 They said to him: “And what is the name of your mother?” He

א"ל ומה שם אמך. א"ל מרים שמה.
א"ל ו>א<מנותיה. א"ל מגלחת

²⁷ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 40 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 80), with Schäfer (2011, 46); Schäfer’s own translation ‘(someone) of uncertain origin’, misses the significance of *ethnicus*, a common appellation for a Gentile (from Greek ἔθνικός = Latin *gentilis*).

²⁸ See, for example, Mann (1937–1938, 439); Nemoy (1930, 327).

- said to them: “Her name is Miriam.” They said to him: “And her craft?” He said to them: “She shaves and fixes up women’s faces, and plaits and combs their hair.”
- Heb2 They said to him: “What is the name of your mother and what are her doings?” He said to them: “Her name is Miriam, and she plaits the hair of women (into) plaits.”
- Heb3 “And your mother—what is her name and her doing?” He answered them: “Her name is Miriam, and she plaits the hair of great women.”
- Heb4 “[And what is the name of your mother?” [Yeshu said to them: “Her name is Mi]riam.” “And what is her profession?” He said: “She plaits the hair of women.”
- ומתקנת פני הנשים ומגדלת ומשרקת שערותיהן.
- ואמרו לו מה שם אמך ומה מעשיה ויאמר להם מרים שמה והיא גודלת את שער הנשים גדילים
- ואמך מה שמה ומעשה ענה להם מרים שמה והיא גודלת שער נשים גדולות
- [... ומה שם א]מך [אמר להם יישו שמה מ]רִים ומה מלכתה אמר מגדלת שער שלנשים היא

All the witnesses agree that Yeshu’s mother was called Miriam. They also agree that she was a hairdresser, a claim that must go back to a claim in the Aramaic text that she was מגדלה, that is, ‘plaiting’ women’s hair. JA3 abbreviates the description by merely claiming that she was a hairdresser, and Heb4 takes the Aramaic verb גדל as Hebrew, in spite of the possible change of

meaning (from ‘plait’ to ‘raise’).²⁹ But Heb2/Heb3 probably preserve a translation of an Aramaic phrase such as מגדלה גדילן דנשייא, ‘plaiting the plaits of women’, which is why we find גדילים in Heb2 and גדולות in Heb3. In Heb1, we find a more detailed description of the tasks performed by Miriam: in addition to plaiting, she also shaves women’s hair, combs it, and fixes up their faces.

The claim that this was Miriam’s profession is due to a conflation of Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, with a fanciful—and probably also derogatory—etymology of her name.³⁰ The figure of Miriam who plaits women’s hair is found in rabbinic literature as well, and there too she is assumed to be Yeshu’s mother.³¹ However, as both Celsus and some early Christian sources depict Jesus’ mother as a spinner and a weaver of

²⁹ In rabbinic Hebrew, the verb גדל also means ‘to plait’, but it is not clear whether the Hebrew translators of the Aramaic text knew this. The form גודלת in Heb2/Heb3 is what we would expect (see, for example, m Shab 10.6), but מגדלת in Heb4 is not.

³⁰ Given the text’s familiarity with Tiberias and its vicinity, it is noteworthy that it does not make the obvious connection between Mary Magdalene and the village Magdala, a few kilometres north of Tiberias. This village was known in late antiquity as מגדל גניא, and another village, מגדל צבעיא, probably was found to the south of Tiberias; see Leibner (2006).

³¹ See bt Shab 104b; bt Hag 4b, and bt San 67a, with Boyarin (2010, 67–68).

cloth, this too may have given rise to the claim that she was plaiting women’s hair.³²

3.4. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Mother’s Husband (or about His Grandfather)

Textual witnesses: JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in JA1)

JA3	They said: “Your mother’s husband—what is his name?” He said: “Pappos.” “And what is his profession?” He said: “A carpenter.”	קאלו זוג אמך איש אסמה. קאל פפוס. ואיש צנעתה. קאל נגאר.
Heb1	They said to him: “Your mother’s father—what is his name?” He said to them: “His name is Pappos.” They said to him: “And what is his profession?” He said to them: He is a wood carver.”	א"ל אב אמיד מה שמו. א"ל פפוס שמו. א"ל ומה אמנותו. א"ל חרש עצים הוא.
Heb2	They also said to him: “What is the name of your mother’s husband, and what is his profession?” He said to them: “His name is Yoseph, and he is a carpenter.”	וגם אמרו לו מה שם בעל אמך ומה מעשיהו ויאמר להם {..} יוסף שמו וחרש הוא.

³² See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28–29, who quotes Celsus as saying that Jesus ‘came from a Jewish village and from a poor country woman who earned her living by spinning’ (ἀπὸ γυναικὸς... χερνήτιδος), with Chadwick (1965, 28) whose translation I use. For Christian sources see *Prot. Jac.* 10–12 and Gines Taylor (2018). The claim that Mary spun flax recurs in Arabic sources—e.g., Brinner (2002, 647).

- Heb3 and my father died and Yoseph ומת אבי ובא יוסף נגרה³³ ונשא אתה
the carpenter came and
married her.”
- Heb4 They said: “Your mother’s אמרו בעל אמך מה שמו. אמר להם
husband—what is his name?” יוסף בן פפוס שמו. ומה מלכתו. אמר
He said to them “Yoesph ben איש נ[ג] הוא.
Pappos is his name.” “And
what is his profession?” He
said: “He is a carpenter man.”

As Yeshu already told his interrogators who his father and mother were, it is a bit unexpected to have another male ancestor introduced, and the textual witnesses are in disagreement about his identity. In JA3, Heb2 and Heb4, Yeshu is asked about his mother’s husband, presumably assuming that the Gentile Pandera cannot have been Miriam’s husband, and hinting that Yeshu is not only the son of a Gentile man, but also born of his mother’s union with a man who was not her husband. In Heb3, Yeshu himself explain that his father—i.e., Pandera—had died, and then his mother re-married the other male figure; this makes him the son of a Gentile person, but not a child of fornication. Only in Heb1, Yeshu is asked not about his mother’s husband, but about her father; normally, this would be quite an unusual question, as one would expect that his father’s father would be of greater importance. But once it turns out that his father is a Gentile, his paternal genealogy becomes quite irrelevant, whereas that of his Jewish mother may be of some interest.

³³ An *aleph* was added above the following *waw*, probably to reflect the Aramaic form נגרא.

The textual witnesses are divided over whether the other male figure's name was Yoseph (Heb2/Heb3), or Pappos (JA3 and Heb1), with Heb4 conflating the two options by claiming that his name was Yoseph son of Pappos. However, they all agree that he was a carpenter, or a wood carver; Heb3 even uses the Aramaic form נגרה, which probably was there in the Aramaic text from which Heb3 was translated. This surely is due to an attempt to fit into the interrogation the Christian claim that Jesus' father was Joseph the carpenter, a claim that was well known to Jews in late antiquity.³⁴ But the appearance of חרש, 'carver', in Heb2, and of חרש עצים, 'wood carver' in Heb1 (where this biblical term already appeared in the description of Yeshu's father, for which see above, 3.2), might suggest a pun on the Aramaic word חרש or חרשא, 'magician, sorcerer'.³⁵

³⁴ For late-antique Jewish references to Jesus as the son of a carpenter, see Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28, who says that Celsus' Jewish informant referred to Jesus' father as 'a carpenter by profession (τέκτωνος τῆν τέχνην ὁντος)'. See also Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 216, no. 33): בר נגיד בקיס: 'the son of one who works wood'. Cf. Lieber (2018, 123), who translates this as 'and a 'Son' was stretched out upon a cross'. For later periods see, for example, al-Jāhiz's report (Finkel 1926, 23) that 'The best speakers, and the most moderate in their religion among them (i.e., among the Jews) claim that he was the son of Joseph the carpenter' (ابن يوسف النجار).

³⁵ In the Gospels, Jesus is described as a τέκτων (see Mark 6.3) as is his father (see Matt. 13.55). In LXX Isa. 44.13, the same word is used to translate the Hebrew חרש, and it is quite possible that already in his lifetime Jesus' opponents used the dual meaning of Aramaic חרש—which means both 'wood/metal worker' and 'magician'—against him.

The name Pappos is paralleled in rabbinic literature, where it is claimed that Pappos ben Yehudah used to lock his wife indoors, to prevent her from committing adultery.³⁶ It is further suggested—but only in the Babylonian Talmud—that he was the husband of Miriam who plaits women’s hair, who fornicated with Pandera.³⁷ The different textual witnesses thus seem to make an effort to follow either the Christian claim that Jesus’ father was Joseph (Heb2/Heb3 and Heb4), or the claim that is found in the Babylonian Talmud, that Miriam’s husband was Pappos ben Yehudah (JA3, and perhaps also Heb1).

3.5. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Name and His Profession

Textual witnesses: JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in JA1)

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| JA3 | “And you—what is your name?”
He said: “My name is Yesu‘a.”
“And what is your profession?”
He said: “a fisherman.” | ואנת איש <אסמך>. קאל אסמי
יִסֹע. ואיש צנעתך. קאל <ציא[ד]>.
“א'ל אתה מה שמך. א'ל ישו שמי.
א'ל ומה אמנותך. א'ל דייג אני. א'ל
דייג לבד או גם צייד. אמר כן.
“My name is Yeshu.” They said
to him: “And what is your
profession.” He said to them: “I |
| Heb1 | They said to him: “You—what
is your name?” He said to them:
“My name is Yeshu.” They said
to him: “And what is your
profession.” He said to them: “I | |

³⁶ See t Sotah 5.9; pt Sotah 1.7 (17a); bt Gitt 90a; Num. R. 9.12, with Lieberman (1973b, 661) who suggests that the correct name was Yehudah ben Pappos, but the Babylonian sources called him Pappos ben Yehudah.

³⁷ See bt Shab 104b and bt San 67a. Both passages were censored out of the printed editions of the Talmud.

am a fisherman.” They said to him: “Only a fisherman, or also a hunter?” He said: “Yes.”

- Heb2 They also said to him: “What is your name and what are your doings?” He said: “Me—my name is Yeshu‘a, and I am a hunter;³⁸ I hunt the fish.” And they said to him: “You are empty (?) of all friend³⁹ (?). Why did you not chase (?) empty (?) the birds? (?)”
- Heb3 They said to him: “What is your name?” He said: “My name is Yeshu‘a, and my profession—I hunt the fish.” And they said to him: “You are empty (?) of all friends. Why empty (?) the birds? (?)”
- Heb4 “And you—what is your name?” He said: “Y[esh]u.” “[And] what is your profession?” He said: “I am a hunter.”⁴¹
- וגם אמרו לו מה שמך ומה מעשיך ויאמר אני ישוע שמי ואני בעל ציד אצודד את הדגים. ויאמר⁴⁰ לו את ריקם מכל חבר למה לא ר>י>דפתה ריקים את הצפרים
- ויאמרו לו מה שמך אמר ישוע שמי, ומלאכתי אצודד את הדגים. ויאמרו לו אתה ריקם מכל חברים למה ריקים את הצפרים
- ואתה מה שמך. אמר י[ש]ו[ו] ואתה מלכתך. אמר איש צייד אני.

The text of JA3 is straightforward, and has Yeshu revealing his name (which is spelled as in many Christian Arabic texts, يسوع),

³⁸ Lit., ‘an owner, or a master, of hunting’.

³⁹ and חברים could also refer to ‘magicians’, but the meaning remains obscure.

⁴⁰ Lege: ויאמרו.

⁴¹ Lit., ‘a hunter man’.

and saying that he is a fisherman. The Aramaic text behind all the textual witnesses clearly had Yeshu explaining that he is a (צִידִּי (א), i.e., ‘a fisherman’,⁴² but this gave the Hebrew translators some trouble, since in Hebrew צִיד usually means ‘a hunter’.⁴³ This is why in Heb1 Yeshu becomes both a fisherman and a hunter, in Heb2 he is a hunter who hunts fish, in Heb3 he is hunting fish, and in Heb4 he is only a hunter.⁴⁴

The claim that Yeshu was a fisherman—as against the Gospels’ claim that he was a carpenter—must be based on the many references to fishermen and to fishing in the Gospel stories about Jesus. Most significant in this regard is the story of his encounter with the two fishermen, Simon-Peter and his brother Andreas, to whom he says ‘follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’ (ἀλειτουργῶν).⁴⁵ It may also reflect an awareness of the frequent

⁴² That (א)צִידִּי was a common word around the Sea of Galilee is made clear even by the place-name, בית-צִידִּי, ‘the place of fishermen’, which appears in the Gospels as Βηθσαιδα; see esp. John 1.44, where it is stated that Peter and Andreas, as well as Philip, came from there. And cf. below, for Peter and Andreas as fishermen.

⁴³ See, for example, Jer. 16.16; bt Eruv 54b. Note, however, rabbinic references to דג הבא מבית הצייד, ‘a fish that is brought from the home of the fisherman’ (bt Ned 20b) or צייד ששולה דגים מן הים, ‘a fisherman who pulls fish out of the sea’ (bt BK 41b and 116a), which show that in Hebrew too צִיד can refer to a fisherman.

⁴⁴ A similar confusion is apparent in Yehudah Hadassi’s claim about Mark the Evangelist, in *Eshkol ha-Kopher* 99: מְרָקוֹשׁ הִיָּה צִידִּי הַדָּגִים דִּיִּיג, בבִּרְכָּה שֶׁל טַבְרִיָּה, ‘Mark was a hunter of fish, a fisherman in the pool (i.e., lake) of Tiberias’. See Lasker et al. (2019, 694–95).

⁴⁵ See Mark 1.17 and Matt. 4.19.

use of the fish as a symbol for Jesus Christ in early Christian iconography and writings.⁴⁶ And it was well known to the Jews who told al-Jāḥiẓ that Jesus ‘had previously been a fisherman, and an owner of nets, and so were his followers’ (ولقد كان قبل ذلك صياداً (سمك، وصاحب شبك، وكذلك أصحابه).⁴⁷

Heb2/Heb3 add a taunt addressed at Yeshu, whose wording is different in each of these textual witnesses and whose meaning is obscure. It may have resulted from a faulty translation of an Aramaic text, but probably reflects an expansion of the original Hebrew translation, as such expansions are frequently found in these two textual witnesses. The reference to birds may be connected with the famous story of how the boy Jesus made clay birds fly, but although this story appears in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, as well as in Heb1 and in Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B (see above, 0.13), it does not appear in Heb2/Heb3. However, it is also possible that צפרים, ‘birds’, is a scribal error for ספרים, ‘books’, and that this sentence belongs in the following scene, where Heb2/Heb3 use the word ספרים for Heb1’s כתבים. And the word חברים/חבר could be a misreading of הבר(יות), ‘creatures’, but could also mean ‘magic spell(s)’, as in Isa. 47.9 or Ps. 58.6. However, this philological puzzle has yet to be solved.

⁴⁶ For this symbol, which was associated with the Greek word ἰχθύς, ‘fish’, seen as an acronym (what the rabbis would call a *notarikon*) for Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ, ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior’, see the classic study by Dölger (1928–1957), and the more recent study by Rasmus (2012), with further bibliography.

⁴⁷ See Finkel (1926, 23).

3.6. Pilatus and Yeshu: Interrogating Yeshu about His Books of Magic

Textual witnesses: JA1, JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	Then [they] placed [in front of him?] the book of magic, and said to him: “These books—are they new or old?” And he said to them: “They are old, and they are the ones that Balaam son of Beor had. I found them in the land of Egypt, and anything that is of the utmost attainment (?)—it is with them that it is done. I cure the sick and heal the crippled.”	תם וקע[ו] אמאמה? ⁴⁸ כתאב אלסחר פקאלו לה הדא אלכתב גודד או עתק. פקאל להם עתקֹּ הִי, והי אלדי כאנת מע בלעם בן בער. פי בלד מצר [ו]גדתהא. ואן גמיע מא אקצא אלדרך בה<א> אלפעל אברי אלסקים ואשפי אלעליל.
JA3	“...and I found [them] in Egypt.” [...what] benefit do you have from the[m?]” ... “... [the books of magic which [...] with them, and whoever is sick [...].”	[... ...] ופי מצר וגדֹת[הא] ... מנפעה לך פיה[א] ... כתב אלסחר אלֹת[י] ... [בהא ומן כאן מר[י]ץ] ...
Heb1	They said to him: (The) books which were found in your hand—are they new or old?” He said to them: “My teachers	א"ל כתבים אשר נמצאו בידך חדשים הם או ישנים. א"ל רבותיי כתבום וישנים ועתיק>ים הן, מבלעם בן בעור הם {ובמצ מצרים} ⁴⁹ מצאתים.

⁴⁸ Or: תם וקע[ת עיניהם עלי] “Then [their eye] rest[ed upon] (the book of magic)’.

⁴⁹ The scribe marked both words as delenda, but only the first, ובמצ, should be deleted as a dittography. For such dittographies in Heb1 see above, our comments on 0.6.

- wrote them, and they are old and ancient; they are from Balaam son of Beor, and I found them in Egypt. And they heal with their spells all evil illnesses, and sores and wounds.”
- Heb2 They also said to him: “The books that are in your hand—are they old or new?” He said to them: “They are old, and I found them in Egypt, from those that belonged to Balaam son of Beor, and I heal the sick with them.”
- Heb3 “And the books that are in your hands—are they new or old?” He said: “Old, and I found them in Egypt, from those that belonged to Balaam son of Beor, and I heal the sick with them.”
- Heb4 They said to him: “These writings of the magicians that were found in your hand—are they new or old?” He said to them: “They are old, (belonging to) Balaam son of Peor, and I found them in Egypt.” They said to him: “How do they benefit you?” He said
- והם מרפאים בלחישתם כל חלאים רעים וחבורות ופצעים.
- וגם אמרו לו הספרים שיש בידך {המה} חדשים המה אם ישנים ויאמר להם ישנים המה ובמצרים מצאתים מאשר היו לבלעם בן בעור ואני מרפא בהם את החולים.
- והספרים שיש בידך חדשים הם אם ישנים. ויאמר ישנים ובמצרים מצאתים מאשר היו לבלעם בן בעור ואני מרפא בהם החולים.
- אמרו לו אלה הכתבים שלמכשפים שמצאו בידך חדשים הם או ישנים. אמר להם ישנים הם, לבלעם בן בעור⁵⁰, ובמצרים מצאתים. אמרו ל[ו] מה יועילו לך אמר להם אלה כל מה שנבקש לעשות בהם בכל דבר נעשה [...] לנגעים [...]

⁵⁰ Lege: בעור. The spelling with a *peh* probably resulted from a hyper-correction by a scribe living in an Arabic-speaking environment.

to them: “These (books)—
everything that we want to do
with them, in everything, we
do [...] for illnesses [...]

In this passage, there is quite a lot of variation between the textual witnesses, but the gist of their contents is the same. Heb4, and probably also JA3, have the interrogators ask a question, and when Yeshu responds, they add a second question, but in JA1, Heb1, and Heb2/Heb3 there is a single question, followed by a long response. The first question is whether the books of magic used by Yeshu are old or new, and in all the extant textual witnesses Yeshu insists that they are old, that they used to belong to the biblical Balaam son of Beor (see Num. 22.5; 24.3, 15, etc.), and that he found them in Egypt. The second question, which is only implied in JA1, Heb1, and Heb2/Heb3, is what benefit Yeshu derives from these books, and his answer is that he heals the sick with the help of these books; this is a claim that will recur in 6.5, when Yeshu and Yoḥanan will explain in greater detail what they can accomplish with their books of healing. However, there are numerous small differences in the wording of these claims, and some textual witnesses probably reflect errors of translation or textual transmission. Heb1’s רבוֹתַי כְּתוּבוֹם, ‘My teachers wrote them’, contradicts the claim that the books were written by Balaam and were found in Egypt (and cf. Heb1’s references in 0.8 and 2.2 to the Egyptian wizards), and it seems likely that the Aramaic text read מְרוֹוְתָא! כְּתוּבֵי, ‘My masters! The writings (are old, etc.)’, especially since Heb1 will make the very same mistake in 4.5 (see our comments *ad loc.*). And in JA1,

אקצא ואלדרך makes little sense, and may be an error for אקצא ואלדרך (i.e., اقضى وادرك), '(everything that) I accomplish and attain'.

The claim that Jesus learned his magic in Egypt is very old, and was known already to Celsus, who wrote his 'True Doctrine' in the 170s CE.⁵¹ It is ultimately based on a combination of Matthew's story of the Flight to Egypt (Matt. 2.13–23) and the entrenched stereotype of Egypt as the land of magic *par excellence*.⁵² Rabbinic literature too knows about Yeshu's stay in Egypt—or, rather, in Alexandria—but he is supposed to have stayed there with his teacher, R. Yehoshu'a bar Peraḥiah.⁵³ However, in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* no further mention is made of Yeshu's stay in Egypt, except for the long introductory interpolation in Heb1 (see above, 0.6, 0.8 and 0.9, and cf. Heb1 in 2.2).

The claim that Jesus learned his magic from books probably was known to al-Jāḥiẓ, who refers to the 'reading of books' at the end of the long catalogue of magic-related accusations that the Jews hurl at Jesus (see the full citation above, in our comments on 2.1). Al-Jāḥiẓ does not state that these were books of magic, but this is implied by the context in which they are mentioned. And the same claim probably re-emerges in the writings of the Karaite Yehudah Hadassi, in the twelfth century, when he stated that Jesus 'learned from them (= the Egyptians) and studied from the books and the magic and sorceries of the Egyptians'

⁵¹ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28; 1.38, with Gallagher (1982, esp. 41–50).

⁵² For this stereotype, see Bohak (2000, 220–21).

⁵³ See bt San 107b and bt Sot 47b.

(כי ישו מהם נתלמד וגריס מספריהם ומכשפנותם ולהטיהם של מצרים).⁵⁴ However, Hadassi explicitly connects these books with the religion of the Sabaeans, so his claim may be due to his direct or indirect familiarity with the medieval Arabic discourse of the Sabaeans and their books of magic, a discourse that was also utilised by Maimonides. Elsewhere in his writings, Hadassi displays his familiarity with stories found in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, but not with our text.⁵⁵

The assumption that magic is best learned from *written* books fits well in the world of late antiquity, where written collections of magical recipes and ritual instructions were extremely common.⁵⁶ One famous demonstration of this assumption is provided by the *Acts of the Apostles*, where we read how some of those who practised magic (τῶν τὰ περίεργα πράξαντων) in Ephesus saw the miracles wrought by Paul and burnt their books (τὰς βίβλους κατέκαιον) in public.⁵⁷ Another is found in a detailed—and

⁵⁴ Yehudah Hadassi, *Eshkol ha-Kopher* 100, in Lasker et al. (2019, 698–99), and cf. Firrouz (2018, 107, n. 808).

⁵⁵ For the medieval Arabic traditions about the Sabaeans, see esp. Hjärpe (1972), and Stroumsa (2004). For Hadassi’s use of motifs from *Toledot Yeshu*, see Firrouz (2018, 22, 104–9) and Goldstein (2021b).

⁵⁶ For a recent survey of such manuals as found in Roman and early-Byzantine Egypt, and a detailed bibliography, see Dieleman (2019). For Jewish magical recipe books in late antiquity, see Bohak (2008, 143–226).

⁵⁷ Acts 19.19. ‘Magic’, or ‘sorcery’, is the accepted translation of *περίεργα* in this verse, but a more general term, such as ‘superstition’, or ‘nonsense’, might be more accurate in this context.

quite nasty—account of Mani’s career, as recounted by Hegemonius in the *Acta Archelai* and rehearsed by Epiphanius. There, Mani is described as the slave of a Persian widow, who inherited from her the dualistic texts and the books of magic that she had in turn inherited from the Egyptian magician Terebinthus, who was the slave of the Arab merchant-cum-magician Scythianus. Scythianus himself, it is claimed, learned his magic from the Egyptians and the Indians.⁵⁸ We shall return to this story below, in our comments on 6.12 and 7.2, where we will note additional parallels between the stories told about Mani and his teachers and those told about Jesus by their respective detractors. But at present, we must note that the suggestion that Yeshu used *written* books of magic in his attempts to dupe his followers was in no way unique to our text, and was shared by other polemical texts about the founders of new religions.

To fully understand this and the next two passages (3.7 and 3.8), we must remember that in late antiquity possessing books of magic could get one into serious trouble with the authorities. In the legal codes, this is first attested in the writings of Ulpian, in the late-second or early-third century CE, when he notes that judges should not deal with inheritances involving harmful drugs or poisons, and adds that,

⁵⁸ See Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai* 62–66 (Beeson 1906, 90–95), and the English translation by Vermes (2001, 140–48); Epiphanius, *Panar.* 66.1–3 (Holl 1915–1933, III:15–21), and the English translation by Williams (2013, 227–31). For an attempt to correlate these stories with the Manichaeans’ own propaganda, see Gardner (2020, 20–32), and for the magic practised by Mani’s teachers see Spät (2004, esp. 7–11).

the same goes for the treatment of books on unacceptable subjects, on magic, perhaps, or anything of the sort (*libris improbatae lectionis, magicis forte vel his similibus*). All such things should be destroyed at once (*haec enim omnia protinus corrumpenda sunt*).⁵⁹

The prohibition against possessing books of magic emerges in even fuller force in the *Opinions* of Julius Paulus, probably compiled ca. 300 CE, where we read that,

Those who take part in the magic arts should be executed in the most extreme manner, i.e., thrown to the beasts or nailed to a cross, and the magicians themselves should be burnt alive (*Magicae artis conscios summo supplicio adfici placuit, idest bestiis obici aut cruci suffigi. Ipsi autem magi vivi exuruntur*); no one is permitted to have in their possession books of the magic art (*libri artis magicae*); anyone in whose possession they are found shall have their property confiscated and the books publicly burnt, and they themselves shall be deported to an island; *humiliores* shall suffer capital punishment. Not only is the profession of this art but also the knowledge is prohibited'.⁶⁰

That this was not just some unheard of piece of legislation is made clear by the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus, including his detailed description of the burning of books of divination and

⁵⁹ *Justinian's Digest* 10.2.4.1. I have used the translation edited by Watson (1985, I; there are no page numbers).

⁶⁰ *Pauli Sententiae* 5.23.17–18. The English translation, and a fuller discussion, are found in Rives (2003, 328–34; reprinted, with some modifications and an Afterword in Rives 2011, 91–99).

magic, and the persecution of their owners, in Antioch in 371 CE.⁶¹ Thus, for the author(s) of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, Yeshu's practice of magic was a good reason for the Roman governor to crucify him, and even his ownership of magic books was sure to bring him into trouble with the authorities. However, when it comes to the Jewish authorities, things are less clear-cut, for although rabbinic literature does speak of 'books of diviners', and insists that every magician should be put to death, it never describes magicians who use books in order to perform their magic, and it has nothing to say about the search for such books, or the punishment of those who possess them.⁶² Moreover, as we shall see in our comments on 8.2, in rabbinic *halakha*, magicians are stoned to death, and there is some debate over whether they should also be hung—but only after they have been stoned. Thus, although *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* has the Jews killing Yeshu, the legal grounds for doing so seem to be based on Roman, and not on Jewish, assumptions.

The attribution of the books of magic to Balaam, which will prove false in 3.8, is no doubt based on the comparison between 'Balaam the wicked', which is his common designation in rab-

⁶¹ Ammianus, 29.1.41 and 29.2.2–4; for Ammianus' reports on the persecution of magic and magicians, see Dickie (2001, 251–54, 285–87 and 314–15).

⁶² For 'books of diviners' (ספרי קוסמין), see t Hull 2.20 (Zuckermann 1970, 503) and bt Hull 13a, and cf. bt Ber 56a, for the oneiromantic manual used by a dream-interpreter; for the punishment of a 'magician' (מכשף), see m San 7.4, 11. For a fuller discussion of the rabbinic discourse of magic, see Bohak (2008, 351–91).

binic literature, and ‘Yeshu the wicked’ of our own text (see below, our comments on 6.1).⁶³ We shall return to this comparison below, in our comments on 7.4. However, this attribution is also based on the well-attested custom, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, of attributing manuals of magic to figures of the distant past, be they Moses, Solomon, or—in the Greco–Egyptian world—Hermes, Dardanus, Astrampsychus, and so on.⁶⁴ In rabbinic literature, we find an obscure reference to a ‘notebook of Balaam’, in which it was written that Balaam was killed by Pineḥas when he was thirty-three years old.⁶⁵ In medieval Karaite texts we find a reference to a ‘Book of Balaam’ which supposedly was a magical book used by Rabbanite Jews but about whose contents nothing else is known.⁶⁶ However, in our own text we will soon hear that the books which Yeshu now attributes to Balaam were not written by him after all.

3.7. Pilatus and Yeshu: Further Interrogations about His Books of Magic

Textual witnesses: JA1, JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

JA1	They said to him: “Why do you use magic and why do you teach people teachings of evil?”	פקאלו לה למאדא אנת מסתעמל אלסחר, ולמאדא תעלם אלנאס תעלימאת אלסו. {ת=ת} תם קאלו לה
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⁶³ For בלעם הרשע see, for example, pt San 10.2 (28d), bt Ber 7a, etc.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Swartz (1994a); Boustán (2007). For some Greco–Egyptian examples, see Betz (1982, 165–67).

⁶⁵ See bt San 106b with Murcia (2014a, 621–52), and cf. our comments on 7.4.

⁶⁶ See Markon (1958), with Mann (1931–1935, II:76).

- Then they said to him: "Tell us in truth—where did you get these books, or else we will kill you and not show you mercy and will throw your body to the wild beasts."
- JA3 "And why do you dabble in magic and teach the world evil teachings? Tell us, then, in truth—where did you get these books, or else we will kill you and not show you mercy."
- Heb1 They said to him: "Tell us the truth—where did you find these writings, and you teach and instruct people, and you and they mislead the world. Tell us the truth, and if [not—we will kill] you."
- Heb2 They said to him: "We know that you roam the world, and you also do evil deeds, and you sin and also mislead the people of the world with these books. Tell us the truth, and if not—we will kill you."
- Heb3 They said to him: "We know that you roam the world, and you also do evil deeds, and you
- אכברנא עלי אלחקיקא מן אין לך
הדה אלכתב ואלא נקתלך ולא
נרַחמך ונרמי נבילתך לאלוחוש.⁶⁷
- ולאיש תשתגל באלסחר ותעלם
<אלעלום> אלרדיה ללכלק. ולכן קל
לנא מן חקא מן אין לך האולי
אלכת[ב], ואן גיר דלך קתלנאך ולם
נרחמך.
- אמרו לו האמת אמור לנו אנה מצאת
כתבים אלה, ואתה מלמד ומורה
לאנשים [ומ]תעה אתה והם את
העולם. אמר לנו האמת ואם [לא
נה]רוג אותך.
- ויאמרו לו אנחנו נדע כי אתה משוטט
בעולם. וגם אתה עושה מעשים רעים
ואתה חוטא וגם מתעה את אנשי
העולם בספר קאלה.⁶⁸ ספר לנו
באמת ואם לא נהרוג אותך.
- ויאמרו לו אנו נדע כי אתה משוטט
בעולם וגם אתה עושה מעשים רעים
ואתה חוטא ואתה תתעה⁶⁹ את אנשי

⁶⁷ Lege: ללוחוש.

⁶⁸ Lege: בספריך אלה or בספרים אלה.

⁶⁹ Lege: מתעה.

	sin and you mislead the people of the world with these books of yours. Now tell us the truth, and if not—we will kill you.”	עולם בספריך אלה. עכשיו ספר לנו באמת ואם לא נהרוג אתך.
Heb4	They said to him: “And why did you deal with these things, and you teach an evil teaching to all creatures? And these books that are in your hand—if you tell us the truth, whose (books) they are; and if not, we will kill you, and t[hro]w your body to the animals of the field.”	אמרו לו ולמה נתעסקתה באלה ותלמד לימוד רע לכל הברואים. ואלה הכתבים שיש בידך אם תאמר לנו האמ[ת] למי הם, ואם לו ⁷⁰ נהרוג אותך ונש[לי]ך נבלתך לחיות השדה.

As in the previous passage, there is quite a lot of variation between the textual witnesses, but the gist of their contents is the same. JA1, JA3 and Heb4 have the interrogators asking Yeshu why he uses magic and teaches evil teachings; Heb2/Heb3 frame this part as an accusation, rather than a question; and Heb1 omits the reference to magic here (but includes it elsewhere, e.g., in 2.2). All the textual witnesses have the interrogators threatening Yeshu and insisting that he must tell the truth about the origins of his books. The fact that both JA1 and Heb4 include the threat of throwing Yeshu's body to wild beasts probably proves that it was there in at least some of the Aramaic texts. But the fact that JA3, Heb1, and Heb2/Heb3 do not include this threat probably means that other Aramaic texts did not include it.

⁷⁰ Lege: לא.

3.8. Pilatus and Yeshu: Yeshu Says That He Received the Books of Magic from Yoḥanan the Dyer

Textual Witnesses: JA1, JA3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| JA1 | He said to them: “My masters, know that these books are not ancient and I did not find them in Egypt, and they are not by Balaam. In fact, they are by Yoḥanan the Dyer and he is my teacher.” | פקאל להם יא סאדתי אעלמו אן הדא אלכתב ליס הי עתק ולא וגתהא ⁷¹ במצר ולא הי לבלעם ואנמא הי ליוחנא אלצבאג והו מעלמי. |
| JA3 | He answered and said to them: “My masters, th[ese books ...]” ⁷² | אגאב וקאל להם יא סאדאתי <ה[דה]> ⁷³ [...] ... |
| Heb1 | He said to them: “These books are not ancient, nor old, and I did not find them in Egypt; rather, Yoḥanan my master ⁷⁴ and teacher, the Dyer—he gave them to me, and he taught them to me.” | א"ל כתבים אלה לא עתיקים ולא ישנים הם ולא בצר' ⁷⁵ מצאתים, כי אם יוחנן רבי ומלמדי הצבע הוא נתנם לי והוא לימדם לי. |
| Heb2 | He said to them: “You are my masters and I say to you (the) truth. Know that these books are by Yoḥanan the Dyer, from whom I have learned.” | ויאמר להם אתם {אנ} אדוני ואני אומר לכם אמת. דעו כי הספרים האלה המה ליוחנן הצובע אשר למדתי ממנו. |

⁷¹ Lege: וגדתהא.

⁷² JA3 breaks off here.

⁷³ The sign which I read as a ה may also be a space-filler at the end of the line.

⁷⁴ Elsewhere, I translated רבי as ‘my teacher’, but in this case the text’s רבי ומלמדי necessitates a different translation.

⁷⁵ Lege: במצרים, i.e., במצר.

- Heb3 He said to them: "You are my masters; I speak to you righteousness. Know that the books that are in my hand are by Yoḥanan the Dyer, and I learned from him."
- Heb4 He said to them: "These writings are not old and they are not new, and they are not by Balaam." They said to him: "And from where do you have them?" He said: "They are by Yoḥanan the Dyer, and he is my teacher, and he gave them to me and I learned them."
- וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אַתֶּם אֲדֹנָי אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר לָכֶם
צֶדֶק דַּעוּ כִּי הַסְפָּרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדִי הֵמָּה
לְיוֹחָנָן הַצּוֹבֵעַ וְאֲנִי לְמַדְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ.
- אָמַר לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַכְּתָבִים לֹא יִשְׁנִים
הֵם וְלַחֲדָשִׁים⁷⁶ הֵם וְלֹא לְבִלְעָם הֵם.
אָמְרוּ לוֹ וּמֵאֵינְ אֱלֹהֵי לָךְ. אָמַר לְיוֹחָנָן
הַצֶּבַע הֵם וּרְבִי הוּא וְנָתַנָּם לִי וּלְמַדְתִּי
אוֹתָם.

All the textual witnesses agree in describing Yeshu as admitting that the books he is using were written by Yoḥanan the Dyer. In JA1, Heb1, and Heb4 he first admits that they are not ancient, and that he did not find them in Egypt (JA1 and Heb1) and/or that they were not written by Balaam son of Beor (JA1 and Heb4); in other words, what he claimed in 3.6 was a blatant lie. Heb2/Heb3 do not include this admission, and Heb4 adds another question by Yeshu's interrogators, between his admission that he had lied and his confession of the truth.

JA1, JA2, and Heb2/Heb3 have Yeshu address his response to 'My masters', an exclamation that will reappear elsewhere in the text (see esp. Ar3's מַאֲרוֹתָא in 4.5). JA3 however reflects the recurrent Aramaic formula, מַתִּיב וְאָמַר, which is found throughout

⁷⁶ Lege: 'but new', אֲלֵא חֲדָשִׁים, although one might expect וְלֹא חֲדָשִׁים.

our text, and probably was there in the Aramaic text from which JA3 was translated.

All the textual witnesses, in all three languages, consistently refer to John the Baptist as *יוחנן מצבענא* (Aramaic), *יוחנן הצ(ו)בע* (Hebrew) and *יוחנא אלצבאג* (Judaean-Aramaic), i.e., ‘Yohanan the Dyer’. This is due to the double meaning of the verb *צבע*, ‘to dye’, i.e., ‘to dip in a coloured solution’, but also ‘to dip oneself, or parts of one’s body, or others, in liquid’.⁷⁷ In Christian Palestinian Aramaic, *מצבענא* is indeed used as an appellation of John the Baptist, and the same is true for Mandaic.⁷⁸ In Arabic, he is known as *الصباغ*, reflecting the same phenomenon.⁷⁹

The dual meaning of *צבע*, in the sense of ‘to dye’ and ‘to immerse in water’ (for which the usual Hebrew verb is *טבל*) is also attested in late-antique Hebrew. In a passage in the Hekhalot literature, we find elaborate instructions intended to assure one’s ritual purity, including *ויהיה צובע באמת המים*, ‘and he should immerse (himself) in the water channel’.⁸⁰ Normally, one would expect the root *טבל* for such a ritual ablution, and a later glossator added on the margin of one of the manuscripts of this passage that *כמו (ו) ויכבס, ומת(רגמינן) ויצבע* is צובע, ‘like “and he should wash

⁷⁷ See Sokoloff (2017, 519–20) and Sokoloff (2020, 924).

⁷⁸ See Sokoloff (2014, 243), and Drower and Macuch (1963, 250). Sokoloff (2011, 22) suggests that the word entered the Aramaic text of *Toledot Yeshu* via the Mandaic, but this is unwarranted, as the following discussion will demonstrate.

⁷⁹ See Wehr (1961, 502). I do not know why the JA texts call him *אלצבאג* rather than *אלצאבג*.

⁸⁰ See Schäfer (1981, §623).

(his clothes),” which the Targum renders as ויצבע.⁸¹ The reference is to Targum Onqelos to Lev. 11.25 and many other verses, and one may also add such examples as Targum Onqelos to Lev. 15.17: וכל לבוש... ויצטבע במיא, ‘and every garment... and it shall be thoroughly washed in water’. Thus, the appellation מצבענא, ‘Dyer’, for the man who thoroughly dipped his followers in the water of the Jordan River hardly is unusual, and probably was shared by several Aramaic dialects, and later by Arabic as well. That it was known to speakers of Hebrew in late antiquity may also be seen from an anti-Christian *piyyut* that is tentatively attributed to Yannai, where ‘Those who support a *mamzer* as an idol’ (see above, our comments on 3.1) are also described as הטופלים בצביעת טנף, ‘those who defecate / immerse in a baptism of filth’, with צביעה for the Christian baptism and a vicious pun based on טפל as a phonetic alternative for טבל, ‘to immerse (one-self in water)’ and as a verb which in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic means ‘to defecate’.⁸²

The fact that Yohanan the Dyer is a key figure in our narrative, and even described as a ‘son of God’ (see below, 6.5 and

⁸¹ The gloss is found in MS Oxford 1531, and see Schäfer (1981, §623).

⁸² For the *piyyut*, see Zulay (1938, 382). For the variation between fricative *peh* and *beth* in Palestinian Jewish sources, see Kutscher (1976, 17). For טפל, ‘to defecate’ see an unpublished dream interpretation text (which I am preparing for publication elsewhere), with the sequence [מאנוי ומפק מימן] דח' גר' טפיל... דח' גר' מ, ‘One who sees himself (in a dream) defecating... one who sees himself [removing] his clothes and passing water...’ And cf. Rand (2013, 15), whose translation (‘those who paint over with a coat of filth’) misses the specific reference to baptism.

6.11) is noteworthy, since John the Baptist does not figure prominently in ancient Jewish texts. He is famously, and favourably, described by Josephus (*Ant.* 18.116–119), but is never mentioned in rabbinic literature or in the other late-antique Jewish texts. Moreover, in the Gospels too, John the Baptist does not figure in the accounts of the trial and execution of Jesus. However, as we shall note below (in our comments on 7.1), the claim that he was executed together with Yeshu may have been known to Celsus. At this stage, we may note that Eusebius, in one of several references to the forged protocols (*hypomnēmata*) of the trial of Jesus that served as anti-Christian propaganda, may have known of such a text where both Jesus and John played a central role. For, having cited what Josephus had said about John the Baptist and about Jesus (*Ant.* 18.63–64, the passage now known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*), Eusebius goes on to say that if a Jew speaks so favourably about John and Jesus, ‘what alternative is there but to convict of shamelessness those who have concocted the protocols about them?’ (τοὺς τὰ κατ’ αὐτῶν πλασμαμένους ὑπομνήματα).⁸³ Eusebius may have had in mind one set of *hypomnēmata* about John and one about Jesus, but the simplest interpretation of this statement is that he knew of a text that, just like *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, covered the trial and execution of both John and Jesus in the same text.

The claim that John the Baptist was Jesus’ teacher is shared by JA1 and by Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4, and will recur several times in later passages, in different textual witnesses (see

⁸³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.11.9 (LCL translation, with minor modifications).

below, 4.3, 4.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 7.1). It is also attested in Heb5, embedded in a passage that is not paralleled in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, in which it is mentioned in passing that Yeshu ‘took for himself a teacher, that is, Yoḥanan the Dyer (ועשה לו רב והוא יוחנן (הצבע)’.⁸⁴ This claim is also cited by Agobard, in his report of all the nasty things that the Jews say about Jesus. He begins his account by saying that,

For they also read in the teachings of their ancestors that Jesus was a certain young man who was respected among them, and was educated under the tutorship of John the Baptist (*Nam et in doctrinis maiorum suorum legunt Iesum iuuenem quendam fuisse apud eos honorabilem et magisterio Baptistae Iohannis eruditum*).⁸⁵

From the stories told about John the Baptist and his followers in the New Testament, one cannot conclude that Jesus was one of John’s disciples, but this claim has been made in some early Christian writings, and has often been raised in modern scholarship about Jesus and John.⁸⁶ However, it is not really clear why

⁸⁴ This is found in JTS 6312, fol. 67b; there is another reference to Yeshu ‘and his teacher Yoḥanan (ורבו יוחנן)’, in fol. 68a, and cf. Heb5’s phrase ויוחנן רבו in 6.2.

⁸⁵ See Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206), with Schäfer (2011, 32); see also Bammel (1997b).

⁸⁶ For ancient claims see, for example, the (seventh c. CE) *Jesus-Messiah Sutra*, verse 168 (English translation by Saeki 1951, 141), and cf. the *Mandaean Book of John* 30 (Häberl and McGrath 2020, 82–87). For a detailed survey of the modern claims, and much further bibliography, see Ernst (1989), who concludes that Jesus was not one of John’s disciples, and cf. Marcus (2018, 27, 86–91, 96–97, 116), who suggests that he was.

Gzar-dina de-Yeshu decided to pay so much attention to the figure of John the Baptist, and one wonders whether its authors were familiar with Christian or Judaeo-Christian groups for whom John was a central figure. But be this as it may, it is clear that in our text both Yeshu and Yoḥanan are condemned and crucified, as we shall see below.

4.0. Pilatus and Yoḥanan

The interrogation of Yeshu led to his mentioning Yoḥanan's involvement in the crimes of which he is accused, so the narrative next turns to this second culprit, who is brought before Pilatus and interrogated.

4.1. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Inquiring about Yoḥanan

Textual witnesses: Ar3, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| Ar3 | [...] that if you wish we will send and summon Yoḥanan the Dyer and see what he says and pass judgment upon them (i.e., Yeshu and Yoḥanan). | [...] דאם עבדתון ¹ נשלח ונקרי יתיה ליוחנן מצבעאנא וניחזי מה דאמר ונידון יתיהון. |
| JA1 | (Pilatus) the governor said to Marinus the elder: "Do you know where Yoḥanan the Dyer is?" He said to him: "He is in Keph̄ar Naḥum." And he (Pilatus) ordered to bring him over. | פקאל אלקאיד למרינוס אלשיך הל תערף אין יכון יוחנא אלצבאג. פקאל לה יכון פי כפר נ{ו}חום. פאמר באחצ<א>רה. |
| Heb1 | Then Pilatus the governor said to them—to R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and to Marinus the respected elder of (the) Jews: "And where is Yoḥanan?" They said to him: "In the town of Keph̄ar Naḥum." | אז אמר להם פילטוס ההגמון לר' יהוש' בן פרחיה ולמרינוס זקן הנכבד של יהודים ואנה יוחנן. א"ל בכפר נחום המדינה. |

¹ Lege: צביתון.

Heb2 Petalus the governor answered and said to Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi, and also to Marinus, the elder of the Jews: "From which place is this Yoḥanan the Dyer?" They answered him and said to him: "In truth did Yeshu'a the wicked say to us that these books belong to Yoḥanan the Dyer, and this wicked Yeshu'a did not write them, but Yoḥanan the Dyer (did). And they sinned with them, and they also misled the people of the world." And our rabbis answered and said to Petalus: "If our master wishes² authority, that we will kill these wicked men, since they are dealing with magic and with writings of falsehood, and they mislead people and say to them, 'We have (the ability) to kill and also to revive', and they make their souls liable to being killed. And they think

ענה פטלוס השר ויאמר לרבי יהושע בן פרחיה הנשיא וגם למרינוס זקן {שליהודה} שלייהודים מאי זה מקום הוא זה יוחן {ש'} <נ> הצובע השיבו אותו ויאמרו לו באמת דבר לנו ישוע הרשע כי הספ<ר>ים האלה של יוחנן הצובע המה. וישוע הרשע זה לא הוא כתובם³ כי אם יוחנן הצובע ויהיו חוטאים בהם וגם היו מתעים את אנשי העולם. ויענו {=} רבותינו ויאמרו⁴ לפטלוס אם ירצה אדונינו⁵ רשות שנהרוג את הרש⁶ים האלה שהם מתעסקים בכשפים ובכתבים <ש>לאון. והמה מתעים בני אדם ואומרים להם יש בידנו להמית וגם להחיות. ויחיבו את נפשותם להריגה והם מחשבים שהם שותפים לאלוה. אבי ר<א>ה נא מה עשו אלה האנשים קמו ויתעו לאנשים הרבה ויובילו אתם אל המדבר ועתה ימותו מן הרעב וגם הכסף אשר עלי<ה>ם חק לתת לאדונינו לא יעזבום שיתנו. ויכתוב פטלוס השר ויאמר להם אם ארצו⁶ גם אני אשלח עליהם וגם אביא את יוחנן הצובע. ונראה מה יצא מן {המפש} המשפט ונשפוט עליהם.

² Add: 'and he will grant us', or a similar expression.

³ Lege: כתבם.

⁴ Lege: ויאמרו.

⁵ Add: וייתן לנו רשות, as in Heb3, or some similar expression.

⁶ Lege: תרצו.

that they are equal with God. Father, please see what these people have done—they rose and misled many people, and led them to the desert, and now they will die of hunger; and also the money which is with them—it is the law to give it to our master, (but) they will not let them give it.” And Petalus the governor wrote and said to them: “If you wish, I too will send for them, and will also bring Yoḥanan the Dyer, and we shall see what comes out of the trial, and we will try them.”

Heb3 Pelatus the governor answered and said to Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi, and also to Marinus, the elder of the Jews: “From which place is this Yoḥanan the Dyer?” He answered him and said to him: “In truth did Yeshu‘a the wicked say to us that these books belong to Yoḥanan the Dyer, and this wicked Yeshu‘a did not write them, but

ענה פלטוס השר ויאמר לר' יהוש' בן פרחיה הנשיא וגם למרינוס זקן היהודים מאיזה מקום זה יוחנן הצובע השיב אתו ויאמר לו באמת דבר לנו ישוע הרשע כי הספרים שליוחנן הצובע הזה המה, ושתוק⁷ הרשע הזה לא כתוב⁸ כך⁹ אם יוחנן הצובע, ויהיו¹⁰ חוטאים בהם וגם היו מתעים את אנשי עולם ויענו רבותינו זכרם לברכה ויאמרו לפלטוס השר ירצה אדננו ויתן לנו רשות שנהרוג את האנשים האלה שהם מתעסקים

⁷ Lege: וישוע.

⁸ Lege: כתבם.

⁹ Lege: כי.

¹⁰ Lege: ויהיו, or ויהיו.

Yohanan the Dyer did. And they sinned with them, and also misled the people of the world. And our rabbis—may their memory be for a blessing—answered and said to Pelatus the governor: “Does our master wish to grant us authority, that we will kill these men, since they are dealing with magic and with writings of falsehood, and they mislead people and say to them, ‘We have authority to kill and also to revive’, and they make their souls liable to being killed. And they think that they are equal with God. Please see what these people have done—they rose and misled many people, and brought them to the desert, and now they will die of hunger; and also the money which is with them—it is the law to give it to our master, (but) they will not let them give it.” And Pelatus the governor wrote and said: “If you wish, I too will

בכשפים ובכתבים שלאון והמה
מתעים בני אדם ואומרים להם יש
בידינו רשות להמית ולהחיות ויתחיבו
נפשם להרגה והם מחשבים שהם
שותפים לאלוה ראה נא מה עשו
האנשים האל' קמו ויתעו לאנשים
הרבה ויביאום למדבר ועתה ימות¹¹
מן הרעב וגם הכסף אשר עליהם חוק
לתת לאדנינו לא יעבים¹² שיתנו.
ויכתוב פלטוס השר ויאמר אם תרצו
גם אני אשלח אליהם ואני אביא את
יוחנן הצובע ונראה מה יצא מן...¹³

¹¹ Lege: ימותו.

¹² Lege: יעזבוים.

¹³ A line or more were omitted from the text here.

send for them, and will also
bring Yoḥanan the Dyer, and we
shall see what comes out of...”¹⁴

Heb4	Pilatus the governor answered and said to Marinus the elder of the Jews: “Where is this Yoḥanan the Dyer?” He said to him: “In [the town of ?] Keph- [Naḥum]. And if [... ...]”	השיב פילטוס ההגמון ואמר למרינוס זקן היהודים אפוא¹⁵ הוא זה יוחנן הצבע אמר לו בכפר [נחום ...] ואם [... ...]
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All the textual witnesses agree that Pilatus asks one or more of the Jewish protagonists about the whereabouts of Yoḥanan. In JA1 and Heb1, and probably also in Heb4, he receives a straight-forward answer, stating that Yoḥanan is in Keph̄ar Naḥum. Capernaum, located on the Sea of Galilee some 12 km north of Tiberias, was one of the major centres of Jesus’ activity, and is frequently mentioned in the Gospels.¹⁶ In rabbinic literature, it was associated with heretical activities, no doubt a reflection of the ongoing presence there of followers of Jesus even several centuries after his death.¹⁷ It therefore hardly is surprising that *Gzar-*

¹⁴ A line or more were omitted from the text here.

¹⁵ Lege: איפה.

¹⁶ See Matt. 4.13, 8.5, 11.23 and 17.24; Mark 1.21, 2.1, 9.33; Luke 4.23, 31, 7.1, 10.15; John 2.12, 4.46, 6.17, 24, 59, with Zeichmann (2017), and the studies cited in the following footnote.

¹⁷ See Eccl. R. 1.8 (Hirshman 2016, 76) on the *minim* of Keph̄ar Naḥum, and cf. Eccl. R. 7.26 (Kiperwasser 2021, 122): “‘And a sinner will be caught by her’—These are the people of Keph̄ar Naḥum’. For recent surveys of the historical and archaeological evidence relating to Capernaum in late antiquity, see Arubas and Talgam (2014), and Becker (2015). For the numerous late-antique Christian graffiti from Capernaum, see Ameling et al. (2023, nos. 6239–6414).

dina de-Yeshu identified Keph̄ar Naḥum as the place where Yoḥanan the Dyer may be found, and later on we will learn that Yeshu's disciples are also found in the same town (see below, 5.2).

Whereas the texts of Ar3, JA1, and Heb1 are relatively short, Heb2/Heb3 present a much longer—and rather garbled—text, which must be a later interpolation. Parts of the interpolated text repeat what had already been said earlier, namely, that the books were written by Yoḥanan the Dyer and that Yeshu and Yoḥanan used them to mislead the world. Other claims embedded here are based on the claims that will be made by Yeshu and Yoḥanan later in the story, about their ability to kill and to revive the dead (see below, 6.5). But the statements made by ‘our rabbis’—who are never mentioned as a group in the other textual witnesses—include the claim that Yeshu and Yoḥanan pretend to be ‘equal with God’ (שוותפים לאלה), and this claim may reflect the Muslim discourse of *shirk* as a cardinal sin.¹⁸ And they also mention two incidents that are not mentioned in the other textual witnesses, namely, that Yeshu and Yoḥanan brought their followers to the desert, where they would soon die of hunger, and that they did not let their followers give Pilatus the money—presumably, the taxes—that they were supposed to pay him. Both these claims seem to be based on accounts in the Gospels: The first claim echoes the two stories of the feeding of the multitudes, to which we referred in our comments on 0.13, and the second echoes Jesus’ famous response to the question of whether Jews

¹⁸ And cf. below, 8.9, where Heb3 is alone in insisting that God has no equal (שתיף). For the dangers of *shirk*, see Sinai (2023, 425–43).

should pay taxes to the Romans, as recounted in Matt. 22.15–22, Mark 12.13–17 and Luke 20.20–26.

The interpolated passages in Heb2/Heb3 add several other elements to the narrative, including the reference to the books owned by Yeshu and Yoḥanan as כתבים של און, ‘writings of falsehood’, a claim that echoes the famous rabbinic pun on εὐαγγέλιον, ‘good news, Gospel’, as און גליון in bt Shab 116a.¹⁹ And it also has the Jewish leaders ask Pilatus for permission to kill both Yeshu and Yoḥanan, a request that stands in marked contrast with the rest of our narrative, where the Jews ask Pilatus what should be done to the two culprits (6.13), and he insists that it is they who should punish them (6.14).

4.2. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Finding Yoḥanan

Textual witnesses: Ar3, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

Ar3	And Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah looked for Yehudah Svriota and Shime‘on Kepha and Binyamin, and sent them after Yoḥanan the Dyer. And they went to the town Kephars Tanḥum, and Yehudah the	ובְעָא ר' יהושוע בן פרחית ²⁰ ליהודה סְבְרִיּוּטָא ולשמעון כיפא ולבנימין ושדרינון על יוחנן מצבענא. ואזל ²¹ [ו] לכפר תנחום מדינתא ואזל יהודי ²² גנאה ²² וגברין עימיה ואשכחו יתיה אסיר דאסריה טברינוס ²³ קיסר והוה קא מטעי עמא רבא מן יהודא.
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¹⁹ For this pun see below, 5.4, n. 31.

²⁰ Lege: פרחיה.

²¹ Lege: יהודה.

²² For גנאה, the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic word for ‘gardener’, see Sokoloff (2020, 225). I am grateful to Ohad Abudraham for this reference.

²³ Or: טברינוס.

gardener went with (some) men, and they found him (i.e., Yoḥanan) imprisoned, for Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned him, and (i.e., since) he was misleading a great (number of) people from among the Jews.

- JA1 He sent a guard (or, a courtier) [] שמ[עון] כפא ובנימין אלטגוס ותלאה²⁴ [] א[לי כ]פר נחום ורא יו[ח]נאן אלצבאג, פוגדוה מחבוס מן כתר מה קד אהלך אלנאס בלסחר.²⁵
- Heb1 They sent for Yehudah שלחו ליהודה איסקריוטא ושמעון כיפא ובנימין אלטיגוסון והלכו לכפר נחום המדינה, ומצאוהו אסור בבית הסוהר שאסרו טברינוס קיסר {מ=ר} המלך יען שקם והתעה את העולם. ועם רב מיש' הזכירו הדבר לפני קיסר וגזר ולקחו[הו].
- Isariota, and Shime'on Kepha, and Binyamin Altigason, and they went to the town Kephah Nahum, and they found him (i.e., Yoḥanan) imprisoned in jail, since King Tiberinus Caesar imprisoned him, because he rose and misled the world. And many people from among the Jews mentioned this to Caesar, and he decreed, and they took [him].

²⁴ Lege: ותלאה?

²⁵ Lege: באלסחר. The syntax of the sentence is a bit unusual, but the sense is clear.

- Heb2 They answered him and said to him (i.e., Pilatus): "Yes; send Yehudah, who wears torn (garments), and also Shime'on Kepha, and Binyamin who is cursed in the army (?). He sent them, these (men), and they went to the town Keph̄ar Naḥum, and found Yoḥanan imprisoned in jail, for Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned him, since he had been misleading the people of the world.
- Heb3 ... who wears torn (garments), and also Shime'on Kepha, and Binyamin who is cursed. And he (Pilatus) sent this one (?) with them, and he commanded and they went to the town Keph̄ar Naḥum (or, Tanḥum). And they found Yoḥanan imprisoned in jail, for Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned him, since he had been misleading the people of the world.
- Heb4 [... ...] Yehudah Iscariota, and Shime'on Kepha, and Binyamin Altigus, and three men with him [... ...] C[ae]sar [...]
- ויענו אותו ו>אמרו לו הן שלח את יהודה הלובש קרועים וגם את שמעון כופא²⁶ ואת בנימין המקולל בגיס. וישלח אותם את אלה וילכו אל כפר נחום המדינה וימצאו את יוחנן והוא אסור בבית הכלא. בעבור כי אסרו טברינוס קיסר שהיה מתעה לאנשי עולם.
- ... הלובש קרועים וגם את שמעון כיפא ואת בנימין המקולל וישלח אתם את זה וצוה וילכו אל כפר תחום²⁷ המדינה וימצאו את יוחנן והוא אסור בבית הכלא בעבור כי אסרו טברינוס קיסר שהיה מתעה לאנשי עולם.
- [... ...] יהודה איסכריוטא ושמעון כיפא [וב]ינימין אלטיגוס ושלשה אנשים עֲמֹו [... ...] ל[... ...] ק[י]סר [] א[...]

²⁶ Lege: כיפא.

²⁷ Lege: תנחום, or נחום.

The textual witnesses diverge on many points here, but they all agree on three of the persons sent to look for Yohanan, namely, Yehudah Iscariota, Shime'on Kepha, and Binyamin Altigoson. The first and the third of these names caused quite a headache to the Aramaic copyists and the Hebrew translators. In Ar3, Iscariota became סבריוטא, surely reflecting the spelling סבריוטא (which is also the standard spelling of this name in the Peshitta translation of the Gospels), and a graphic confusion between *kaph* and *bet*. But in Heb2/Heb3 the name got garbled in a much more creative—and amusing—manner, with a confusion between קריות (probably a place-name) and קריעות, 'tearings', so that 'the man of Keraioth' became 'he who wears torn (garments)'.²⁸ And Binyamin's puzzling moniker, 'Altagus' (JA1), or 'Altigoson' (Heb1), or 'Altigus' (Heb4) proved even more difficult to handle. In Ar3 it was simply omitted, whereas in Heb2 it was partly translated, with אלטי taken as a passive form of the Aramaic verb לוט, 'to curse', and גיס left untranslated, thus ending up with the meaningless המקולל בגיס, 'who is cursed in the army'.²⁹ In Heb3, the situation was slightly ameliorated by the omission of the second word, so that Binyamin is nicknamed המקולל, 'the cursed one'.

²⁸ For the many etymologies of the name Iscarioth offered by modern scholars, and for the ancient claim that his name means 'the one who suffocated', see Taylor (2010).

²⁹ In Hebrew, the word גיס could mean 'army, troop', as well as 'brother-in-law'. In Aramaic, it could also mean 'side'. But none of these meanings would help make sense of המקולל בגיס.

Regardless of their distortion by some of the text's transmitters, the presence of these three figures in our text is quite puzzling. Shime'on Kepha certainly is Peter, whose original name was Simon, and who was nicknamed Kephas in Aramaic, or Petros in Greek, both words meaning 'rock'.³⁰ Yehudah Iscariota is Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, and the one who eventually betrayed him. Binyamin is a mystery, and even more mysterious is his appellation. The reading ܣܠܬܝܢ in JA1 might make us think that the -ܠܝܢ is the Arabic definite article, in which case the Hebrew versions—which preserve the -ܠܝܢ (Heb1 and Heb4) or reflect it (even in mistranslation)—would all have to be dependent on the Judaeo-Arabic text. But this is extremely unlikely, as the Hebrew translations were made from Aramaic texts, and not from Judaeo-Arabic. Thus, a reading such as ܣܠܬܝܢ , ܣܠܬܝܢ , ܣܠܬܝܢ (see below, 5.2) or ܣܠܬܝܢ probably goes back to some of the Aramaic texts. If it is a Greek loanword, one may think of $\alpha\lambda\iota\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$, 'fisherman', an adjective attached to the names of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew in the Gospels (Mark 1.16–17 and Matt. 4.18–19). Or one might think of a Greek name like Alphaeus, which appears several times in the Gospels.³¹ However, none of these suggestions seem persuasive. Moreover, as we noted in our comments on 1.2, and as we shall see in the following

³⁰ See esp. John 1.42: $\epsilon\mu\beta\lambda\epsilon\psi\alpha\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\tilde{\omega}\ \delta\ \text{'}\text{Ιησο\text{ύ}\varsigma\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\text{πεν,}\ \Sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \Sigma\acute{\iota}\mu\omega\text{ν}\ \delta\ \nu\acute{\iota}\delta\varsigma\ \text{'}\text{Ιω\text{άν}\nu\eta\text{ν}\text{ου}\cdot\ \sigma\tilde{\upsilon}\ \kappa\lambda\eta\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\eta\ \text{Κη}\phi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma\ (\delta\ \acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\eta\text{ν}\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \text{Π}\acute{\epsilon}\tau\text{ρ}\text{ος}),$ 'Looking at him, Jesus said: "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas, which, when translated, is Petros (= Rock)."'

³¹ For James the son of Alphaeus, see Matt. 10.3; Mark 3.18; Luke 6.15; Acts 1.13. For Levi son of Alphaeus, see Mark 2.14.

passage, Heb1 assumes that אֶלְטִיגוֹס is Pilatus' deputy (and Ar3 calls him אֶגְלִיטוֹס), and in 4.6 and in 5.2 we will meet אֶגְלִיטוֹס/אֶלְטִיגוֹס as one of Yeshu's disciples. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to this textual crux.³²

The choice of these three as emissaries who are sent to bring Yoḥanan the Dyer will recur later in the text, when they will be sent to bring the disciples of Yeshu (see below, 5.1). This choice may be due to a familiarity with the Christian stories of how Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, and how Peter denied him on the night when he was arrested and tried.³³ And it probably is based on an assumption that since these two were disciples of Jesus, they knew what John the Baptist—and Jesus' disciples—looked like, and thus could help bring them to Pilatus. This, of course, is not very different from the assumption in the Gospels that because Judas knew Jesus well, he could lead his persecutors directly to him. However, it is not really clear whether *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* sees Yehudah Svriota and Shime'on Kepha as disciples of Yeshu, since when his disciples will be listed, in 4.6, we will hear of a Yehudah, who may or may not be Yehudah Svriota, and of Petrus, who is not identified with Shime'on Kepha.

All the extant textual witnesses record that when the emissaries reached Kephār Naḥum, they found out that Yoḥanan was

³² And note the suggestion by Meerson and Schäfer 2014, I:134, no. 33, that the name אֶגְלִיטוֹס is due to confusion with אֶגְלִיטוֹס הַגְּמֹן who is mentioned in rabbinic literature as a contemporary of Rabbi Yoḥanan—see pt San 1.6 (19b).

³³ For Judas' betrayal, see Matt. 10.4; 26.14–16, 25, 47–49, etc. For Peter's denial, see Matt. 26.34–35, 69–75, etc.

in jail. This claim accords well with the accounts of the Gospels, and of Josephus, but these sources are unanimous in having Herod Antipas, and not Tiberius, as the ruler who imprisoned John the Baptist. On why he did this they disagree. The Gospels of Mark and of Matthew claim that John had reproached Herod Antipas for marrying Herodias, his brother's wife, and that Herod therefore put him in jail, and later had him beheaded at the request of Herodias' daughter (Matt. 14.3–12; Mark 6.17–29). The Gospel of Luke mentions Herod's beheading of John, but does not delve on the details (Luke 9.9), and the Gospel of John briefly refers to John being imprisoned (John 3.24) but does not even mention his execution. Josephus, on the other hand, recounts the story of Herod's marriage with Herodias (*Ant.* 18.109–110), without connecting it with John, but subsequently claims that Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist in the fortress of Machaerus, and had him killed there, because he was afraid that John's influence on his many followers might lead to sedition (*Ant.* 18.118–119). But in our narrative, it is Tiberinus Caesar who placed Yoḥanan in jail, and he did so because Yoḥanan had misled the people, a theme that we encountered already in 1.1, 2.1, 2.2 and 3.7. JA1's claim that this was done 'with magic', probably reflects an Aramaic text that said so, even though it is not found in Ar3. And in this passage we can see how Ar3, and probably also JA1, reflect the reading עמא, 'the people', whereas Heb2/Heb3 reflect the reading עלמא, 'the world', and Heb1 reflects both readings, a change that we already noted in our comments on 1.1.

4.3. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Yoḥanan is Brought before His Interrogators

Textual witnesses: Ar3, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| Ar3 | And they brought Yoḥanan the Dyer, and placed him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and before Marinus and before Agl[i]tus. | ואיתוהו ליוחנן מצבענא ואקימו יתיה קדם ר' י(ש')הושוע בן פרחיה וקדם מרינוס וקדם אגל[י]טוס. |
| JA1 | And they took him out (of jail) and he came before ³⁴ the governor and Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus the elder and the crowd. | פאכרגוה וגא אלא חצרת אלקאיד וחצרה יהושוע בן פרחיה ומרינוס אלשיך וחצרה אלגמאעיה. ³⁵ |
| Heb1 | And they brought him before Yoḥanan the Dyer, Yeshu's teacher, and placed him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and before Marinus and Altigus and Pilatus the governor. | והביאוהו לפני יוחנן הצבע רב ישו והעמידהו לפני ר' יהוש' בן פרחיה ולפני מרינוס ואלטיגוס ופילטוס ההגמון. |
| Heb2 | And they brought Yoḥanan the Dyer, the teacher of Yeshu'a the wicked, before Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi and before Marinus the elder of the Jews, and before Petalus the governor. | ויביאו את יוחנן הצובע מלמד שישוע ³⁶ הרשע לפני יהושע בן פרחיה הנשיא ולפני מרינוס זקן <ש>ליהוד<י>ם ולפני פטלוס השר. |

³⁴ Lit., 'to the presence of'.

³⁵ Lege: אלגמאעה.

³⁶ Lege: שלישוע.

- Heb3 And they brought Yoḥanan the Dyer, the teacher of Yeshu'a the wicked, before Yehoshu'a ben R. Peraḥiah the Nasi and before Marinus the elder of (the) Jews, and before the governor.
- Heb4 [And they brou]ght Yoḥanan, the teacher [of Yeshu, and placed him] before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah [and before Marinus the e]lder of the Jews, and before [... ...] and Rabbi Yehudah the gardener [... ...]
- ויביאו את יוחנן הצובע מלמד שלישוע הרשע לפני יהושע בן ר' פרחיה הנשיא ולפני מרינוס זקן יהודים ולפני השר.
- [והבי]או ליוחנן מלמד[ן של ישו ...] לפני ר' יהושע בן פרחיה [ולפני מרינוס זקן היהודים ולפני [... ...] ור' יהודה גננה [... ...]

All the textual witnesses agree that Yoḥanan was brought before Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus, but diverge when it comes to the other interrogators. Ar3 adds a person named אגליטוס³⁷, who re-emerges later in Ar3 as אגליטוס הגמונאה, 'Aglitus the governor', i.e. a corruption of the name Pilatus (see below, 6.1). Heb2/Heb3 refer to 'Petalus the governor' (פטלוס השר) or to 'the governor (השר)', i.e., Pilatus; Heb1 has both Pilatus and אלטיגוס, presumably a corruption of אגליטוס. Only JA1 goes its own way with אולגמאעיה, which presumably is a translation of אוכלוסין, 'a crowd', or 'crowds', for which see our comments on 1.3. Other than that, there are only minor differences between the textual witnesses, with all the Hebrew textual witnesses describing Yoḥanan as Yeshu's teacher (as in 3.8 and elsewhere), and Ar3 and JA1 making no mention of this fact here. In addition we can

³⁷ See above, Figure 2.

see how the Aramaic direct object marker -ל was mistranslated both in Heb4, [והבי]או ליוחנן and in Heb1, where והביאוהו לפני יוחנן makes the sentence quite meaningless ('they brought him', i.e., Yoḥanan, 'before Yoḥanan').

In the following scenes, we see a clear split in the transmission history of the text. In JA1, which is well preserved, once Yoḥanan is brought before the interrogators, he and Yeshu are asked about the identity of the five disciples who are with them. The narrative then moves to the trials and executions of the five disciples. Since some of the intervening scenes are found not only in Heb1 and in Heb2/Heb3, but also in Ar3, one might think that this is a mere omission in JA1. However, in Heb4, which is very fragmentarily preserved, all these scenes also seem to have been omitted. Thus, we should either assume that JA1 and Heb4 are dependent one upon the other, directly or indirectly, or that they both are translations of an Aramaic text which already omitted all these scenes.

4.4. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Interrogating Yoḥanan about the Books of Magic

Textual witnesses: Ar3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Ar3 Yehoshu'a answered and said to Yoḥanan: "These writings of magic that were found in the hands of Yeshu, your disciple— if you tell us the truth, we will release you, but if not, you and	מתיב יהוה <ו>שע ואמר ליה ליוחנן אלין כתב {ב}אבי דחרשי דאשתכחו בידיה דישו תלמידך, אם תימר לנא קושטא שבקינן לך ואם לאו את וישו מתקטלין בחרבא דתרין פומא.
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Yeshu will be executed by a double-edged sword.”³⁸

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Heb1 R. Yehoshu‘a answered and said to Yoḥanan: “These writings that were found in the hands of Yeshu your disciple—where did he find them? If you tell the truth, you are (i.e., will be) saved, but if not, you and Yeshu your disciple will die a strange death.”</p> | <p>ענה ר' יהוש' ואמ' לו ליוחנן אלה הכתבים שנמצאו בידי יישו תלמידך אנה מצאם. אם תאמר האמת נוצלת ואם לאו אתה ויישו תלמידך תמותו מיתה משונה.</p> |
| <p>Heb2 They answered and said: “These books that we found in the hand of Yeshu‘a the wicked, your disciple—if you tell us in truth we will release you, but if not, we will kill you by a double-edged sword.”</p> | <p>ויענו ויאמרו אלה הספרים אשר מצאנו ביד ישוע הרשע תלמידך, {ב} אם תאמר לנו באמת נעזובך ואם לא נהרוג אותך בחרב פיפיות.</p> |
| <p>Heb3 They answered and said to him: “These books that we found in the hand of Yeshu‘a the wicked, your disciple—but if you tell us in truth, and if not, we will kill you by a sword.”</p> | <p>ויענו ויאמרו לו אלה הספרים אשר מצאנו ביד ישוע הרשע תלמידך אבל אם תאמר לנו באמת ואם לאו נהרוג אותך <בחרב>.</p> |

All the textual witnesses that contain this passage are in agreement here, claiming that Yoḥanan’s interrogators insisted on knowing about the books of magic that were found in the hands of his disciple Yeshu, and added a threat in case he did not tell

³⁸ Lit., ‘by a sword of two mouths’. For this expression, see Judg. 3.16: חָרֶב וְלָהּ שְׁנֵי פִּיּוֹת, ‘a sword which has two mouths’; Ps. 149.6: חָרֶב בִּפִּיּוֹת, ‘a two-mouthed sword’. And cf. Prov. 5.4: חָרֶב בִּפִּיּוֹת, ‘a (two-)mouthed sword’.

the truth about them. But we can also see how Ar3 and Heb2/Heb3 frame the question addressed to Yoḥanan in general terms, whereas Heb1 provides a more specific question—אנה מצאם, ‘where did he find them?’ The threat that accompanies the question—execution by a double-edged sword—is translated by Heb1 as ‘you will die a strange death’, whereas Heb3 refers to ‘a sword’, and Heb2 has ‘a two-mouthed sword’, just as in Ar3.

The formulation of the question (“if you tell us the truth”), and the threat uttered by Yehoshu‘a, are paralleled in Roman court proceedings, where one finds descriptions of the judge threatening the suspected culprits with punishments, while ordering them to confess the truth (τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐξομολογήσασθε!).³⁹

4.5. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Yoḥanan’s Response

Textual witnesses: Ar3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Ar3	Yoḥanan answered and said to them: “Masters! These writings—Yeshu wrote them. I—Tiberinus Caesar had im[pris]oned me, and Yeshu [...] did not show me, but he	מתיב יוחנן ואמר להון מארותא כתאבי אלין ישו כתבין. אנא הוה א[סי]ר יתי טברינוס קיסר וישון [...] לא חזי ⁴⁰ לי אלא הוה הוא וחד עשר תלמידיה כתבין וקא מטעי {ב}להון ⁴¹ בני אינשא.
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³⁹ See Pap. Oslo II 17, as discussed by Bekken (2015, 78–79), and the other examples adduced by Coles (1966, 47–48).

⁴⁰ Lege: לא אחזי.

⁴¹ The scribe began to write בהון, i.e., ‘with them’, but corrected it to להון, ‘to them’, which is grammatically awkward. The phrase he was copying may have read וקא מטעי לבני אינשא, ‘and were misleading people with them’.

and his eleven disciples wrote them and were misleading people (with them)."

Heb1 Yoḥanan answered and said to them: "These writing (are) from my teachers, and this Yeshu wrote them and copied them, for I was imprisoned, since King Caesar imprisoned me. And he copied them, and did not show them to me, and he and his twelve disciples know them, and they rose and are misleading the world."

Heb2 Yoḥanan answered and said to them: "My masters! These books are books of magicians, and Yeshu'a the wicked wrote (them), and I was in jail, since Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned me. And I did not see Yeshu'a the wicked, but he and his eleven disciples wrote these books, and they are dealing with them and mislead (the) people of the world. And they say about me that they (i.e., the books) are mine, but he wrote them out of his own mind."⁴³

ענה יוחנן וא"ל מרבתיי הכתבים, וזה יישו כתבם והעתיקם כי אני הייתי אסור שאסרני קיסר המלך והעתיק[ם] ולא הראם לי והוא ושנים עשר תלמידיו יודעין אותן⁴² וקמו ומתעים את העולם.

השיב יוחנן ואמר להם אדוני הספרים האלה ספרי מכשפים המה. וישוע הרשע כתב ואני הייתי בבית הכלא שאסרני טברינוס קיסר. ואת ישוע הרשע לא ראיתי אילא הוא ואחד עשר תלמידיו כתבו את הספרים האלה, והמה מתעסקים בהם ומתעים אנשי עולם. ויאמרו עלי כי שלי המה אילא הוא מן לבו כתב אותם.

⁴² Lege: אותם.

⁴³ Lit., 'Out of his own heart'.

Heb3 Yoḥanan the Dyer answered and said to them: “My masters! These books are books of magicians, and Yeshu‘a the wicked wrote them, and I was in jail, since Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned me. And I did not see Yeshu‘a the wicked, but he and his eleven disciples wrote these books, and they are dealing with them and mislead (the) people of the world. And they say about me that they (i.e., the books) are mine, and they are not mine, but he wrote them out of his own mind.”	השיב יוחנן הצובע ואמר להם אדני הספרים האלה ספרי מכשפים המה. וישוע הרשע כתב אתם ואני הייתי בבית הכלא שאסרני טברינוס קיסר ואת ישוע הרשע לא ראיתי אלא <הוא> ואחד עשר תלמידיו כתבו את הספרים האלה והמה מתעסקים בהם ויתעו אנשי עולם. ויאמרו עלי כי שלי המה ולא שלי המה אלא הוא מן לבו כ>ת>ב אתם.
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All the textual witnesses that contain this passage agree in having Yoḥanan deny that the books are his, claiming that he could not have written them, since Tiberinus Caesar had put him in jail; he further insists that Yeshu wrote the books, and that Yeshu and his disciples used them to mislead people. In Heb1, we can see a clear case of mistranslation, when the exclamation ‘my masters!’ followed by ‘these books are...’ is rendered as if Yoḥanan is saying that these books are from his masters (or teachers); this also contradicts the following statement, that Yeshu wrote them, and it is an error which Heb1 already committed in 3.6, as we noted above.⁴⁴ We can also see how Heb1’s translator rendered the typical JBA form *qa* + participle too literally, ‘and they rose and are

⁴⁴ For the exclamation ‘my masters!’ at the beginning of an answer see also 3.8, and cf. ‘my master!’ in 8.7.

misleading’ (וקמו ומתעים), instead of ‘and they are misleading’, as in Heb2/Heb3. Other than that, we can see once again how Heb2/Heb3 have Yoḥanan explicitly identify these books as books of magicians, and how they add a whole sentence at the end of the passage that is not likely to have been there in any Aramaic text, especially as it refers to claims supposedly made by Yeshu’s disciples, who have not yet been mentioned in the text.

The claim that Yeshu wrote the books of magic refutes Yeshu’s own claim in 3.8, that they belong to Yoḥanan. As we noted in our comments on 3.6, in the world of late antiquity owning and using books of magic could be a capital offence, and Yeshu and Yoḥanan try to evade this accusation by claiming that the books are not theirs, and blaming each other.

One interesting feature of this text is the claim—found in Ar3 and in Heb2/Heb3—that Yeshu had *eleven* disciples,⁴⁵ rather than the typological number of twelve that is repeatedly found in the New Testament traditions about the Apostles.⁴⁶ This might seem like a minor scribal error, but it is interesting to note that a similar tradition was known already to Celsus, when he stated that ‘Jesus collected round him *ten or eleven* infamous men (δέκα

⁴⁵ Agobard, in his summary of the Jews’ blasphemies against Jesus (*De Iud. super.* 10; van Acker 1981, 206), says that they say that ‘he had many disciples’ (*plures habuisse discipulos*), but does not provide an exact figure.

⁴⁶ Of course, some New Testament passages speak of eleven disciples (Matt. 28.16, Mark 16.14, Luke 24.9, 33, etc.), but only after Judas hung himself. See also *Acta Pilati* (Tischendorf 1853, 259), for Jesus teaching his remaining eleven disciples after his resurrection.

ἡ ἑνδεκά τινας... ἐπιρρήτους ἀνθρώπους), the most wicked tax-collectors and sailors, and with these fled hither and thither, collecting a means of livelihood in a disgraceful and importunate way'.⁴⁷ It is therefore likely that the claim that Yeshu had eleven disciples actually is an ancient element found in our text, and that the reference to twelve disciples in Heb1, which is also found in Heb5 (see below, 5.9a, and cf. 6.2), reflects an attempt to 'correct' the text in light of the well-known Christian traditions about Jesus' twelve disciples.

4.6. Pilatus and Yoḥanan: Interrogating Yoḥanan about Yeshu's Disciples, and His Response

Textual witnesses: Ar3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Ar3 They answered and said to him: "The disciples of Yeshu—what are their names?" He said to them: "Naqi and Matai and Luqa and Alqi and Altigus and Yehudah, and Paulus and Patmus and Netzer and Buni and Todah."	מתיבין ואִמְרָן ליה תלמידוהי דישו מה שמהוֹן. אמר להון נקי {סט}⁴⁸ ומתי ולוקא ואלקי ואלטיגוס⁴⁹ ויהודה ופולוס ופטמוס ונצר ובוני ותודה.
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⁴⁷ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.62 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 56), and cf. 2.46. Origen cites this passage to show that Celsus got even the number of the Apostles wrong, and that he erred in his characterisation thereof, but cf. Williams (2023, 171–72).

⁴⁸ Or: {סט}.

⁴⁹ Or: ואלטאוס.

- Heb1 They said to him: “What are the names of his disciples?” He said to them: “Naqai, Natzai, Sata[...] and Matai and Altigus and Yehudah, Paulus and Petrus and Netzer and Buni and Todah and Alqi.”
- Heb2 Then they said to Yoḥanan the Dyer that: “The disciples of Yeshu‘a the wicked—what are their names?” Yoḥanan answered and said: “These are their names—Naqi and Alqi and Zakai, Teini and Todah and Patros and Netzer and Situ. These are their names.”
- Heb3 Then they said to Yoḥanan the Dyer that: “The disciples of Yeshu‘a the wicked—what are their names?” Yoḥanan answered and said to them: “These are their names—Naqi and Alqi and Rabbi and Tat and Todah and Petrus and Netzer and Matai. These are their names.”
- אמרו לו ומה שמו[תיהם] של תלמידיו אמר להם נקי נצי סַטַּי ... ומתי ואלטיגוס ויהודה פּוֹלּוֹס ופֶטְרוֹס ונצר ובוני ותודה ואלקי.
- אחריכן אמרו ליוחנן {ק} הצובע כי תלמידי ישוע הרשע מה שמותם ענה יוחנן ואמר אלה המה שמותם נקי ואלקי וזכיי תיני ותודה ופֶטְרוֹס ונצר וסִיתוֹ⁵⁰ אלה שמותיהם.
- אחר כן אמרו לו ליוחנן הצובע כי תלמידי שלישוע הרשע מה שמותם ענה יוחנן ואמר להם אלה הם שמותם נקי ואלקי ורבי וטַט ותודה ופֶטְרוֹס ונצר ומתי אלה שמותם.

In the previous passage, Yoḥanan mentioned Yeshu’s disciples, so his interrogators now want to know their names. However, both the order of the names of Yeshu’s disciples and the names themselves vary quite considerably between the textual witnesses. Five of the names are found in all four witnesses, namely, Naqi,

⁵⁰ Lege: ומתי.

Alqi, Todah, Netzer, and Petrus (if we assume פטמוס to be a corrupt form of Petrus). Matai appears in three witnesses, and probably was corrupted into סיתו in Heb2. To these we should add Buni, who appears in Ar3 and Heb1 (but not in Heb2/Heb3), since he is one of the five disciples who are later executed (see below, 5.7). But when it comes to the other disciples, Ar3 and Heb1 agree in adding Altigus, who probably is not the same as Pilate's deputy (for whom see our comments on 1.2), but might be the same as בנימין אלטיגוס (for whom see our comments on 4.2). Ar3 and Heb1 also agree on the name Yehudah (i.e., Yehudah Iscariota, mentioned in 4.2?), and Paulus,⁵¹ to whom Ar3 adds Luqa (who may have been there in the lacuna in Heb1), and Heb1 adds Natzai. Ar3 also has the name—or the beginning of a name—טט, written and erased, but this name re-emerges in Heb3, and may also be reflected in Heb1's [...]טט. On the other hand, Heb2 adds two disciples, Zakai and Teini, and Heb3 adds only one, Rabbi.

Looking at this textual mess, we may suggest several different factors that shaped the different versions of this list. First, the attempt to have a pre-set number of disciples, either eleven or twelve (see the previous passage); this is visible in Ar3, which claims that Yeshu had eleven disciples, so there are eleven names, and one more name—Tat—was erased, and in Heb1, which claims that he had twelve disciples, and lists twelve names. Second, the need to have the five disciples who will later be executed

⁵¹ Heb2/Heb3 do not mention Paulus here; in 5.2 they will mention טלוס, or פילוס, i.e., Paulus, as one of the disciples who managed to escape.

included in the list; in Ar3, they appear as the first two and the last three names on the list, and in Heb1 they appear as numbers one, four, nine, ten and eleven of the list. In Heb2/Heb3, on the other hand, the lists are truncated—there are only eight names in each of these lists, and only three (Heb2) or four (Heb3) of the five disciples who are later executed are found in these lists, with Buni missing from both lists and Matai missing from that of Heb2.

In addition to the above-mentioned considerations, one more factor that may have shaped the different forms of this list is the desire of some of the text's copyists to make the list more congruent with what they knew from Christian sources. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus chooses twelve apostles, whose names are given as Simon (whom Jesus names Peter), his brother Andrew, James son of Zebedee and his brother John (both of whom he named 'Boanerges', which means 'sons of thunder'), Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who is known as the Zealot, Judas son of James/Thaddaeus, and Judas Iscariot.⁵² To these we may add Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas after Judas' betrayal of Jesus.⁵³ We may also add Paul, who, though not one of the original apostles, described himself as Jesus' chosen 'Apostle to the Gentiles'.⁵⁴

There is no doubt that the Petrus who appears in our list is Simon Peter, who elsewhere in our text appears under his Ara-

⁵² See Matt. 10.1–4; Mark 3.13–19; Luke 6.13–16.

⁵³ See Acts 1.21–26.

⁵⁴ See Rom. 11.13, and the Pauline epistles that open with Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, etc.

maic name, Shime'on Kepha, as we noted above (4.2); interestingly, our text seems unaware of the fact that this is the same person who had already been mentioned before, and may be thinking of them as two different persons. In a similar fashion, it seems clear that Paulus is Paul, that Matai is either Matthew or Matthias, and that Yehudah is one of the two Judases. Todah could easily be Thaddaeus (which would mean that Yehudah is Judas Iscariota), and Luqa probably is supposed to be the Gospel-writer Luke, even though he was not one of the apostles. Alqi may be a corruption of Alphaeus, the father of James, but all the other names in our list seem independent of the claims about Jesus and his disciples that are found in the New Testament. They may depend on non-canonical and apocryphal Christian traditions, but may also be the invention of whoever wrote *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For non-canonical traditions, note, for example, Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.62, on Leves (Λευής), who “was not numbered among the Apostles, except according to one of the copies (κατά τινα τῶν ἀντιγράφων) of Mark’s Gospel.”

5.0. Yeshu's Disciples

The interrogation of Yoḥanan led to the identification of even more culprits, namely, Yeshu's disciples, so it is now time for them to be brought before Pilatus and tried. At the heart of the following passages (5.5–5.9) lies the trial and execution of Yeshu's five disciples, a scene which is found in rabbinic literature as well, as will be noted in our comments on 5.4.

5.1. Yeshu's Disciples: Sending a Mission to Arrest the Disciples

Textual witnesses: Ar3, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Ar3	[They ans]wered and said: "Who is going after them?" Yehudah Svriota answered [... ...]	מת[יבין] ואמרין מן אזיל בתריהון. מתיב יהודה סבריוטא [... ...]
Heb1	Then they said: "Who will go and bring them?" Yehudah Iscariota and Shime'on Kepha and Binyamin Altigus said: "We will go and bring them."	אז אמר ומי ¹ ילך ויביא אותם. אמר יהודה איסקריוטא ושמעון כיפא ובנימין אלטיגוס אנו נלך ונביאם.
Heb2	They said to him: "Who will go and bring them to us?" And Yehudah who wears the torn (garments) said to them, with Shime'on Kepha and with	אמרו לו מי ילך ויבוא ² אותם אלינו. ויאמר להם יהודה לובש הקרועים עם שמעון כיפא ועם בנימין קיללת הגיס. ויקראו אותם ויאמרו התלכו ותביאו אותם וי>א<מרו נלך.

¹ Lege: אמרו מי.

² Lege: ויביא. The *hiriq* under the *beth* probably is an attempt to correct the error.

Binyamin the curse of the army
(?). And they summoned them,
and said: “Will you go and
bring them?” And they said:
“We will go.”

Heb3	They said to him: “Who will go and bring them to us?” Yehudah answered and said with Shime'on Kepha and Binyamin the cursed one. And they summoned them and said: “Will you go and bring them?” And they said: “We will go.”	אמרו לו מי ילך ויביא אתם אלינו ענה יהודה ויאמר עם שמעון כיפ{ה}<א> ובנימן המק<ו>לל ויקראו אותם ויאמרו התלכו ותביאו אותם ויאמרו נלך.
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All the textual witnesses that contain this passage share a very wobbly syntax, which probably is due to the loss of a few words (e.g., ‘Yehudah answered and said: “I will go, with Shime'on, etc.”’), and display some minor differences in wording, as well as the corruption of the names that we already noted in 4.2 (with the slight variation that in Heb2 Binyamin is now called קיללת הגיס rather than המקולל בגיס). But they all agree that once again, Yehudah Iscariota, Shime'on Kepha and Binyamin Altigus were sent to bring in the culprits.

5.2. Yeshu's Disciples: Some of the Disciples Escape

Textual witnesses: Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Heb1	They went to Kephah Naḥum and looked for them quietly. They (i.e., the disciples) heard,	הלך ³ לכפר נחום ובקשו אותם בלט. שמעו אלה וברחו למדינת אפריקא ונחבאו שם תחת אילן אחד. הלכו
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³ Lege: הלכו.

and escaped to the town⁴
Africa, and hid there under a
certain tree. They (i.e.,
Yehudah et al.) went after
them, and found them under
the tree. And when they (i.e.,
the disciples) saw them they
ran away from them, and Alqi
and Paulus and Petrus and
Yehudah in the town of Rome.

Heb2 They went and came to the
town of Keph̄ar Naḥum and
were wandering after them,
and they (i.e., the disciples)
heard and ran away to the
town Africa, and hid under a
certain tree, and they were
dealing with magic, which
they learned from Yeshu'a the
wicked, and they were under
the roots of the tree. And Satai,
and Altagius, and Alqi and
Paulus and Petrus and Zakai
ran away from them.

אלה אחריהן ומצאום תחת האילן.
וכשראום ברחו מהם ואלקי ושולוס⁵
ופיטרוס ויהודה⁶ במדינת⁷ רון(ב)מי.

וילכו ויבאו אל כפר נחום המדינה
ויהיו תועים אחריהם וישמעו ויברחו
אל מדינת אפריקאי⁸ ויחבאו תחת
אילן אחד והיו עוסקים בכישוף אשר
למדו מן ישוע הרשע ויהיו תחת
שרשי האילן. ויברחו מהם סְתִי
ואֵלטָגִיוס ואֵלקי וטלוס⁹ ופפוכוס¹⁰
וזכ״י.

⁴ Or: 'state, province'—presumably, the Roman province *Africa Proconsularis*.

⁵ Lege: ופולוס.

⁶ Lege: ויהודה.

⁷ Lege: במדינת.

⁸ Lege: איפריקיא.

⁹ Lege: ופולוס.

¹⁰ Lege: ופטרס. It is possible that this is what the scribe tried to write, with a very long *tet* and a very round *resh*.

Heb3	They went to the town of Keph̄ar and were wandering after them, and they (i.e., the disciples) heard and ran away to the town Africa, and hid under a certain tree, and they were dealing with magic, which they learned from Yeshu‘a the wicked, and they were under the root of the tree. And Matai, and Altagius, and Alqi and Paulus and Petrus and Zakai ran away from them.	וילכו אל כפר ¹¹ המדינה ויהיו תועים אחריהם וישמעו {אל} מברחו ¹² אל מדינת אפריקא ויחבאו תחת אילן אחד ויהיו עוסקים בכישוף אשר למדו מן ישוע הרשע. ויהיו תחת שרש האילן. ויברחו מיהם מתי ואלטגיוס ואלקי ופילוס ¹³ ופסכוס ¹⁴ וזכרי. ¹⁵
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The three textual witnesses that contain this passage share in common the claim that the messengers went to Keph̄ar Naḥum (about whose significance see our comments on 4.1), but the disciples escaped to Africa and hid under a tree, and that when the messengers found them there, some of the disciples managed to escape. In Heb2/Heb3, we also read that when the disciples hid under the tree, they were dealing with magic, which they had learned from Yeshu (see above, 4.5), and that they managed to hide under the roots of the tree.

From a narrative perspective, this is a very strange scene, and from a textual perspective it is quite corrupt—more so than

¹¹ The word נחום or תנחום was omitted from the text here, at the point where one page ends and the other begins.

¹² Lege: ויברחו.

¹³ Lege: ופולוס.

¹⁴ Lege: ופטרוס.

¹⁵ Lege: זוכיי.

some of the other passages. The claim that some of the disciples managed to escape probably has two different functions. On the literary level, it explains why, if Yeshu had eleven (or twelve) disciples, only five were brought to trial and executed, as we will hear in the following passages. Thus, it may even be an attempt to create an artificial bridge between two conflicting stories that came from different sources (see our comments on 5.4). But it may also have a historical function, in helping to explain to the readers or hearers of this narrative how Christianity—or the faith in Yeshu—survived the execution of Yeshu, Yoḥanan, and the five disciples. If some disciples escaped, it was they who spread the faith to the entire world, and the fact that this list includes both Peter and Paul, the two most important Apostles, supports this interpretation of the current passage.¹⁶

In Heb1, the name which was previously spelled פּוֹלּוֹס has now become שׁוּלּוֹס. This discrepancy might stem from a copyist's knowledge that Paul's Hebrew name was Shaul (see Acts 9.4, 17; 22.7, 13; 26.14), but might also be due to a mere scribal error.¹⁷ An even clearer error is found in Heb3, which lists מַתִּי as one of

¹⁶ Note, however, that in 8.10 we will hear that when Yeshu's body was dragged through the streets of Tiberias, some of his followers believed that it was him, and presumably gave up their Christian faith, but others did not, which also explains how Christianity survived.

¹⁷ Note, however, that the identification of Paul with Abba Shaul (a *tanna* of the early- to mid-second century) was already made by Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ in the ninth century, as recorded by al-Qirḡisānī in the tenth century; see Nemoy (1930, 367), and Stroumsa (2016, xxi). And it re-emerges in several *Toledot Yeshu* texts, for which see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, I:35).

the disciples who escaped, when later on we hear of his trial and execution (see 5.5). Heb2 has ִתְּבִי instead, and this name may be compared with the [...]טְבִי mentioned above, in Heb1.

In all three textual witnesses, there are incongruities in the lists of the disciples. In Heb1, which speaks of twelve disciples, their names were previously given (in 4.6) as “Naqai, Natzai, Sata[... ...] and Matai and Altigus and Yehudah, Paulus and Petrus and Netzer and Buni and Todah and Alqi.” Of these, we now learn that Yehudah, Paulus, Petrus and Alqi escaped, and we will soon hear of the executions of Naqai, Matai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah. This leaves the fates of Natzai, Sata[...], and Altigus unexplained. In Heb2/Heb3, which speak of eleven disciples, their names were previously given as “Naqi and Alqi and Zakai, Teini and Todah and Patros and Netzer and Situ” (Heb2), or as “Naqi and Alqi and Rabbi and Tat and Todah and Petrus and Netzer and Matai” (Heb3). We now learn that Alqi, Petrus, and Zakai managed to escape, that Altagius and Paulus also escaped, even though they were not mentioned in the earlier list (which, as we noted there, is truncated), and that Matai managed to escape even though we would soon hear of his trial and execution. Naqi, Netzer, and Todah will be tried and executed in the following scene, but what happened to Rabbi, Teini, and Tat is never explained. Unfortunately, the scribes who copied these manuscripts—and those who had copied the manuscripts which they copied—were not really bothered by such grave inconsistencies.

At the end of the passage, Heb1 refers to the town of Rome, but the context of this reference is obscure. Did the four disciples who are mentioned here escape to the town of Rome? If this is

what the text has in mind, it may point to a familiarity with the many stories of how both Paul and Peter were executed in Rome.¹⁸ However, this is likely to be yet another addition in Heb1 that is due to its redactor's or copyist's familiarity with 'Helena' texts, where we are told that Yeshu's twelve disciples escaped to several different places, including some who went to Rome.¹⁹

5.3. Yeshu's Disciples: Bringing the Remaining Disciples to Trial

Textual witnesses: Heb1, Heb2/Heb3 (this passage is omitted in JA1 and Heb4)

Heb1 And they (i.e., Yehudah et al.) caught them (i.e., the remaining disciples) and brought them before R. Yehoshu'a and Marinus and Pilatus, and before a great crowd of people.	ואלה תפשוּם והביאוּם לפני ר' יהוש' ומרינ'ס ²⁰ ופילוס ²¹ ולפני המון עם רב.
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¹⁸ For a survey of the earliest of these stories, see Foakes Jackson (1927).

¹⁹ See, for example, MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. Add. Quarto 145 (= Neubauer 2407) (#21687), fol. 60v: שנים עשר נמלטו—ג' הלכו להרי אירט"א ג' הלכו לברטני"א וג' הלכו לדומי וג' הלכו למסינא "Twelve (disciples) fled—three went to the mountains of IRTA (other manuscripts speak of Ararat), three to Britain (other manuscripts speak of Armenia), three to Rome, and three to Messina.'

²⁰ Lege: ומרינ'ס

²¹ Lege: ופילוס.

- Heb2 And those who remained—they brought them before Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi, and before Marinus the elder of the Jews, and before Petalus, and before the crowd of people. וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים הֵבִיאוּ אוֹתָם לִפְנֵי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פֶּרְחִיָּה הַנָּשִׂיא וּלְפְנֵי מְרִינוֹס זֶקֶן שְׁלִיחֵי הַיְּהוּדִים וּלְפְנֵי פֶּטְלוֹס וּלְפְנֵי אֶבְלוֹסִי קַהְלוֹת ²³ בְּנֵי אָדָם.
- Heb3 And those who remained—they brought them before Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi, and before Marinus the elder of the Jews, and before Pelatus, and before the crowd of people. וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים הֵבִיאוּ אֹתָם לִפְנֵי ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פֶּרְחִיָּה הַנָּשִׂיא וּלְפְנֵי מְרִינוֹס זֶקֶן יְהוּדִים וּלְפְנֵי פֶּלְטוֹס וּלְפְנֵי אֶבְלוֹסִי ²⁴ קַהְלַת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם.

The three textual witnesses that contain this passage agree that the remaining disciples were brought before R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah, Marinus the elder, and Pilatus, as well as a crowd, with Heb2/Heb3 preserving the Aramaic word אֹבְלוֹסִי, which surely was there in the text they were translating (see above, 1.3). It is not clear why Yehudah the gardener is not there with them.

²² The first two letters of the following word were written as space-fillers at the end of the line.

²³ קַהְלוֹת is the Hebrew translation of אֹבְלוֹסִי (see above, 1.3), and probably was added as an explanatory gloss.

²⁴ Lege: אֹבְלוֹסִי (and cf. the same error in 6.3), and cf. the previous note.

5.4. Yeshu's Disciples: Introducing the Trial of the Five Disciples

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1?, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4

Ar1	[... ...] Yeshu [... ... th]eir names [are Matai and Na]qi and Buni [and Netzer and Todah ...]	[... ...] יֵשׁוּ מְ שְׁמָהֶם הֵן [מִתִּי וְנָ] קִי וְבוֹנִי [וְנֹצֵר וְתוֹדָה ...]
JA1	And there were with Yoḥanan and Yeshu five people from among the disciples. And Yehoshu'a and Yehudah the gardener said to Yoḥanan and to Yeshu: "Who are these five who are with you?" And Yeshu said: "They are my disciples." And Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah said: "What are their names?" And they said: Naqai, and Matai, and Buni, and Netzer and Todah." And Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah said to them: "Indeed it is necessary for you to be executed, because you use magic." And they were brought forward to be executed.	וְכַאֲן מִעַ יוֹחָנָן וְיֵשׁוּ כְּמִסַּ נְפֻסָּ מִן אֶלְתִּלְאֲמִיד. פִּקְאֵל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְיְהוּדָה אֶלְגָּנָן לְיוֹחָנָן וְלִישׁוּ מִן הֵם הוּלִי אֶלְכִּמְסָה אֶלְדִּי מַעֲכָם. פִּקְאֵל יֵשׁוּ הֵם תִּלְאֲמִידִי. פִּקְאֵל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ ²⁵ בֶּן פֶּרְחִיָּה אִישׁ אֶסְמָהֶם. פִּקְאֵלוּ נְקִי וּמִתִּי וְבוֹנִי וְנֹצֵר וְתוֹדָה. פִּקְאֵל לֵהֶם יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פֶּרְחִיָּה קֵד וְגַב עֲלֵיכֶם אֶלְקָתָל לְאַסְתַּעֲמָלְכֶם ²⁶ אֶלְסַחֵר. פְּקוּדְמוּ לִיקָתָלוּ.
Heb1	And Yeshu and Yoḥanan to there (?)	וְיֵישׁוּ וְיוֹחָנָן לְשָׁם.

²⁵ Lege: יהושע.

²⁶ Lege: לאסתעמאלכם.

- Heb2 And they (R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah et al.) saw them; and he was standing—Yeshu‘a the wicked; and Yoḥanan the Dyer was also standing. ויראו אותם והוא היה עומד ישע הרשע. ויִּוְחָנָן [ה] צֹבֵעַ היה גם הוא עומד.
- Heb3 And they saw him, and he was standing, this Yeshu‘a the wicked; Yoḥanan was also standing. ויראו אתו והוא היה עומד זה ישוע הרשע יוחנן גם הוא עומד
- Heb4 And they asked Yoḥanan [and Yeshu?]: “[... ...] people, the servants [of Yeshu? ...].” And he said: “[... ...].” [And he ask?]ed: “And what [are their names?]” And he said? “[... ...], Netzer and Todah.” ושאלו ליוחנן [... ...] אֲנָשִׁים משרתי [... ...] ואמר [... ...] ושאל? לֹא וּמָה שמוֹתיהם? ואמר? [... ...] נצר ותודה.

The textual witnesses are split here, with Ar1, JA1, and Heb4 going one way and Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 going in a different direction. Having omitted some of the previous passages, JA1 moves directly from the scene where Yoḥanan is brought before his interrogators to the current scene, where he and Yeshu are asked about Yeshu’s five disciples. In this textual witness, Yeshu and Yoḥanan are asked about the identity of the five disciples, and then about their names; the five disciples are then told that they deserve to be killed because they used magic. Both Ar1 and Heb4 are only partly preserved, but both probably did not have the last sentence, and focused only on the names of the five disciples (to whom Heb4 seems to refer as ‘servants’—presumably, the servants of Yeshu). In all these textual witnesses it is not clear how Yeshu got there; he may have been left in custody after his own interrogation in an earlier scene (see above, 3.1–3.8), but

this is never stated. Moreover, the entire passage seems like an introduction to the scene in which the five disciples are tried and executed. Unfortunately, in Ar1 the previous pages are missing, and the beginning of the preserved text is mostly illegible, so it is hard to tell how its narrative unfolded up to—and including—the present scene.

Heb1 and Heb2/Heb3 are very brief, and likely truncated, stating that both Yoḥanan and Yeshu were present. It is even possible that their short statements belong at the end of the previous passage, and that they omitted this passage altogether.

The following five passages (5.5–5.9) cover the execution of Yeshu's five disciples. This scene is also found in the Babylonian Talmud (bt San 43a), and is cited there as a *baraita*, that is, as a *tannaitic* tradition that is not a part of the Mishnah.²⁷ It is the only scene in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* that is also attested in rabbinic literature, and the question arises whether the Babylonian Talmud is dependent on our text, or is our text dependent on the Babylonian Talmud or on the *baraita* which it cites. Alternatively, both could depend on a third source, where this story was first told.

The text found in the Babylonian Talmud is generally identical with our text, with several notable differences. First, the order of the disciples in the Talmudic text is Matai, Naqi, Netzer, Buni, and Todah, whereas in our text some textual witnesses have Matai first and then Naqi, as in the Talmud, but others have Naqi

²⁷ Given its appearance in the Talmud, it is also found in numerous sources that depend upon it, such as *Pirka de-Rabbenu ha-Qadosh*, and cf. Bohak (2018, 647–48, n. 19). For this scene, see also Schäfer (2007, 75–81) and Murcia (2013).

come first and Matai placed second. Moreover, all the textual witnesses agree in having Buni come before Netzer, in contrast with the order in the Talmud. Second, the biblical prooftexts adduced for and against each disciple are the same in the Babylonian Talmud and in our text, with the exception of the case of Naqi. There, all the textual witnesses but one offer different prooftexts, and only JA1 adduces the same verses as found in the Talmud, in an apparent attempt to ‘correct’ the text in line with the well-known Talmudic passage.²⁸ Another minor exception is the case of Todah, where Heb2/Heb3 adduce prooftexts different from those of all the other textual witnesses and of the Talmudic text, but this probably is due to the idiosyncratic nature of Heb2/Heb3, as seen in numerous other passages as well. Finally, a third difference is that the Talmudic *baraita* is silent when it comes to *how* the disciples were executed. This is a point to which we shall return in a moment.

In the Babylonian Talmud, this *baraita* is cited in the context of one of the few references to Yeshu, which appears within a *halakhic* discussion of the treatment of those who are about to be executed. None of the five disciples are mentioned elsewhere in rabbinic literature, and the story of their execution is not alluded to in other rabbinic sources. However, several factors argue strongly for the rabbinic origin of this story.²⁹ First, we may note

²⁸ Additionally, Heb5 has Naqi adducing a prooftext that is different from all the other textual witnesses and from the Talmudic text. However, as Heb5 is a ‘hybrid’ and heavily redacted text, this discrepancy adds little to our knowledge of the earlier versions of our text.

²⁹ For a similar suggestion, see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, I:91).

that barbed exchanges between rabbis and heretics, including the citation of relevant biblical verses, are extremely common in rabbinic literature, and even the exclamation ‘Fool!’ is a recurrent motif in such exchanges.³⁰

Second, the exegetical puns that are embedded in it, with each disciple citing a verse that supposedly supports his innocence but is then refuted by the citation of a biblical verse that condemns him. Such exegetical puns are typical of rabbinic literature, and are found there in many different contexts. The Babylonian Talmud even presents another example of the exegetical punning on the names of two followers of Yeshu in order to prove their guilt, and there are other examples of polemical rabbinic word-games on specifically Christian terms.³¹

A third reason for considering this a rabbinic text is that it parallels—or, more correctly, mirrors—the talmudic version of the famous story of the woman and her seven sons who were executed by a cruel tyrant. In the version of the story found in the Babylonian Talmud, each son is brought before ‘Caesar’ and is told to worship idols. Each son then cites a biblical verse that forbids the Jews the worship of any deity other than God, and is

³⁰ For a recent study, see Bar-Asher Siegal (2019, esp. 43–65).

³¹ See the puns on the names Sasson and Simḥa in *bt Sukk* 48b, and the brilliant analysis by Halbertal and Naeh (2006); see also the nasty pun on the name Stada—supposedly the name of Yeshu’s mother—in *bt San* 67a and *bt Shab* 104b, and cf. the spelling of *εὐαγγέλιον*, ‘good news, Gospel’ as גליון א, ‘falsehood + (blank parts of) a manuscript’ (R. Meir) and as גליון ע, ‘sin + (blank parts of) a manuscript’ (R. Yoḥanan) in *bt Shab* 116a, with Zellentin (2011, 145–60).

then executed.³² Both the structure of the story—with a series of culprits, each of whom adduces a biblical proof-text—and the fate of each culprit, are the same in both stories, but in both stories it is the ‘good Jews’ who have the final word. This is why in the story of Yeshu’s disciples, the culprits adduce a biblical proof-text but the Jews adduce an even better proof-text and the disciples are executed, whereas in the story of the seven sons the Jews are executed—but at least they have the final word, with a fitting biblical proof-text.

To these three considerations a fourth one may be added, namely, that in this scene numerous biblical verses are cited in Hebrew. Elsewhere in our text, there are very few citations of biblical verses, and they are mostly cited in Aramaic or in Judeo-Arabic, rather than in Hebrew.³³ This too may imply that the entire scene with the trial of the five disciples is not an organic part of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. And a fifth consideration which argues for the story’s origins outside *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* is the fact that the story does not fit well within our narrative, which claims that Yeshu had eleven (or twelve) disciples, as we already saw (4.5). Thus, it is not clear why only five of them are tried and executed, and it is this discrepancy that necessitated the addition of a very confused story about the flight of the remaining disciples to Africa (5.2), which seems to paper over the gap between

³² See bt Gitt 57b (interestingly, this story appears soon after one of the rare Talmudic references to Yeshu, in bt Gitt 57a). For the many versions of this story, see Gutman (1959); Himmelfarb (2015); Ben Shahrar et al. (2022, 286–88).

³³ See our notes on this issue in sections II.1.1–7 of the Introduction.

two different traditions about Yeshu's disciples. It thus seems likely that an earlier version of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* did not contain the story of the execution of the five disciples, which was added only at a later stage, and under the impact of rabbinic literature. Although no textual witness that omits this scene has thus far been identified, we may note that neither Agobard nor Amulo refer to the execution of Jesus' disciples in their summaries of the stories about Jesus which they heard from the Jews of Lyons. It is therefore quite possible that the text of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* that was available to the Jews of Lyons in the ninth century did not yet contain this scene.

There is, however, one further complication to our reconstruction of the textual history of this scene, namely, that whereas the Talmudic *baraita* says nothing about *how* the five disciples were executed, our narrative makes an effort to have Yeshu's disciples executed in line with the four methods of execution listed in the Mishnah (m San 7.1): stoning, burning, killing (i.e., beheading), and strangling.³⁴ This is why Matai is strangled, Naqi is burnt (though not in the manner suggested by the Mishnah, as we shall note below), Buni is stoned, Netzer is beheaded, and Todah is merely 'executed,' since there are five disciples, and only four specific modes of execution.³⁵ This is likely to be a secondary addition to an earlier version of the story, for if this were

³⁴ See Lorberbaum (2015, 100–55).

³⁵ I ignore the alternatives offered by Heb2 and Heb3, which are clearly faulty, and have both Naqi and Buni burnt, yet have none of the disciples strangled.

the starting point for the entire story one would expect four disciples to be executed, rather than five. Such a secondary addition is more likely to have occurred in a rabbinic context, and yet it is not attested in the Talmudic version of this story. Thus, it would seem that the story of the five disciples had a life of its own before it was inserted into an earlier version of our text, a life about which we currently know very little.

5.5. Yeshu's Disciples: Trying and Executing Matai

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Additional note: In Ar1 and Heb4, as well as in bt San 43a, Matai is tried first, and Naqi is second, whereas in JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5, Naqi is first and Matai follows. I have rearranged the passages so as to follow the order of Ar1 and Heb4.

Ar1	[... R.] Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah. He said to Matai: "[Why is] your [name called] Matai?" He said [to him: "Because about me] David [said], '[<i>Matai</i> (= When)] will I come and be seen before God?'. ³⁶ He said to him: "F[oo]! No! Thus said D[avid] about you, '[<i>Matai</i> (= when) will he die] and his name perish!'" ³⁷ And he	[... ר'] יהושע בן פרחיה אמ' ליה למתיי [למה אתקרי שמ] ד' מתיי. אמ' [ליה דעלי אמ'] דויד [מתי] אבוא ואראה פני אל'ם. אמ' ליה ש[טי]א לאו הכי אמר עליך ד[ויד מתי ימות] ואבד שמך. ³⁸ ופקיד עלוהי וחנקוהי.
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³⁶ Ps. 42.3.

³⁷ Ps. 41.6.

³⁸ Lege: שמו.

decreed upon him, and they strangled him.

JA1 Then Matai was [brought forw]ard [to be executed] and he said: “How can you execute me when it is said about me ‘*Matai* will I come and be s[een] before God?’” And they said to him: “About you it was said ‘*Matai* will he die, and his name perish’.” And it was ordered that he should be strangled.

תם [קד]ם מְתִי [ליקתל]. פְּקָאל כיף
תקתלוני ועלי אוקיל מְתִי [י] אבוא
ואר[אה] פְּנִי אלהים. פקאלו לה עליך
אוקיל מתי ימות ואבד שמו. פאומר
בכנקה.

Heb1 After him (i.e., Naqi) he (R. Yehoshu'a) summoned Matai. He said to him: “Why is your name called Matai?” He said to him: “About me David said, ‘*Matai* will I come and be seen before God?’” R. Yehoshu'a answered him: “Oh you fool and imbecile—about you he said ‘*Matai* will he die, and his memory perish’” He decreed upon him, and they strangled him.

אחריו קרא למתי א"ל למה ק'³⁹
שמך מתי. א"ל עלי אמר דויד מתי
אבוא ואראה פני אלהי.⁴⁰ ענה לו ר'
יהוש' אי שוטה וסכל, עליך אמר מתי
ימות ואבד זכרו.⁴¹ גזר עליו
והחניקוהו.

Heb2 And after him they summoned Matai, and said to him: “Why is

ויקראו אחריו את מתי ויאמרו לו למה
נקרא שמך מתי ענה ואמר להם עלי

³⁹ Lege: נק'(רא) Note, however, that this could be a reflection of the Aramaic, ק'(רי).

⁴⁰ Lege: אלהי'(ם).

⁴¹ The biblical verse has שמו.

your name called Matai?” He answered and said to them: “About me David said, ‘*Matai* will I come and be seen before God?’” They answered him and said to him: “You are (more) light(-minded) and a fool than all living creatures! Not thus said David about you (in) the Bible, for it says afterwards, ‘*Matai* will he die, and his name perish’” And they ordered about him, and they cut Matai’s head off from his body.

Heb3 And after him they summoned Matai, and said to him: “Why is your name called Matai?” He answered and said to them: “About me King David said, ‘*Matai* will I come and be seen before God?’” They answered and said to him: “You are (more) light(-minded) and a fool than all living creatures! Not thus said David, peace be upon him, about you (in) the Bible, for it says afterwards, ‘*Matai* will he die, and his name perish’” And they

אמר דויד מתי אבוא ואראה פני אלהים. ענו אותו ואמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה מכל החיים. לא כן אמר דויד עליך המקרא כי אם כתוב אחריי מת⁴² ימות ואבד שמו. ויצוו עליו ויכרתו את ראשו של מתי מן קומתו.

ויקראו אחריי מתי ויאמרו לו למה נקרא שמך מתי ענה ואמר להם עלי אמר דויד המלך מתי אבוא ואראה פני אלהים. ענו ואמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה מכל החיים לא כן אמר דויד על' הש' עליך המקרא כי אם כתוב אחריי מתי ימות יאבד⁴³ שמו ויצוו ויכרתו את ראש מתי מקימתו.⁴⁴

⁴² Lege: מתי.

⁴³ Lege: ואבד.

⁴⁴ Lege: מקומתו.

ordered, and they cut Matai's head off from his body.

Heb4 R. Yehoshu'a answered and said to Matai: "Why is your name called Matai?" He said to h[im ... "About] me David said, 'Matai will I come [and be seen before God?]' He said to him:] "No, but about [you he said, 'Matai will he die, and] his name [per]ish'." And he ordered [... ...]

השיב ר' יהושע ואמר ל[מ]תִּי למה נקרא שמך מתי אמר לו ... ע[לִי] אִמְרֵ דָוִיד מתי אבוא [... ...] לֹא [א]בֹל עָלַיְךָ אמר מתי ימות וא[בד] שמו והפקיד [... ...]

Heb5 Afterwards (i.e., after Naqi) they said to the second (disciple): "Why is your name called Matai?" He said to them: "About me the Bible said, 'Matai will I come and be seen'⁴⁵?" They said to him: "It is not thus, but it said 'Matai will he die, and his name perish'." And they decreed upon him, and they strangled him.

ואח"כ אמרו לשני למה נקרא שמך מתי אמ' להם עלי אמ' המקרא מתי אבוא ואראה⁴⁶ אמרו לו אינו כן אלא אמ' מתי ימות ואבד שמו וצוו עליו וחנקו אותו

All the textual witnesses agree that Matai cited Ps. 42.3 as a proof-text supporting his claim to God's favour, and that his opponent(s) responded by citing Ps. 41.6 as a proof that he should be executed. The same verses are also adduced in bt San 43a. In Ar1, Heb1, and Heb4, it is R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah who runs the interrogation and orders the execution, but in JA1, Heb2/

⁴⁵ Heb6 adds: 'before God'.

⁴⁶ Heb6 adds: פני אלהים.

Heb3, and Heb5 it is a collective ‘they’ who do this. More significantly, in Ar1, JA1, Heb1, and Heb5 Matai is executed by strangulation, but in Heb2/Heb3 he is beheaded.⁴⁷ Such minor discrepancies will reappear in the executions of the other disciples as well. Heb2/Heb3 also use the unusual expression קל ושוטה מכל החיים, which may be a translation from an Aramaic expression that would be akin to—but the exact opposite of—Dan. 2.30: ואנה...לא בחכמה די איתי בי מן כל חייא... ‘And I, (it is) not because I have (more) wisdom than any living creature...’⁴⁸

5.6. Yeshu’s Disciples: Trying and Executing Naqi

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Additional note: For the order of the trials of Matai and Naqi, see the note to the previous passage.

Ar1	Th[ey brought Na]qi. He	א[תוה לנ]קי. אמ' ליה [למ]ה
	(Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah) said	[את]קרי שמך נקי. אמ' ליה עלי אמר
	to him: “[Why i]s your name	[דויד] נקי [כפּיס] וב[ר לב]ב. אמ'
	called Naqi?” He said to him:	[לי]ה לנקי ש[טיא לאו ד]אמ' עלך
	“About me [David] said, ‘ <i>Neqi</i>	קרא ונקה לא אנקה. ⁴⁹ ופקיד על[והי
	(= The one who has clean)	ור[מו]ה[י] גו אתון [נורא יקי]דתא.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the expression מן קומתו that is found in Heb2/Heb3 might be a translation from Aramaic, but it does not appear in the Aramaic textual witnesses in 5.8, in the description of Netzer’s beheading.

⁴⁸ However, the use of the word קל might point to a mistranslation from—or the influence of—a language in which ‘light-weight’ and ‘foolish’ are covered by a single word, as in Arabic خفيف.

⁴⁹ Lege: נקה. One can also think of Jer. 30.11, ונקה לא אנקה, but this verse would be less likely in our context, and all the other textual witnesses argue for Exod. 34.7.

[hands] and a p[ure hea]rt’.”⁵⁰

He said to [Naqi: “F]ool! No, for the Bible said about you, ‘and He (God) shall *naqe* not *yenqe* (= shall by no means absolve (the sin))’.”⁵¹ And it was ordered ab[out him and they th]rew him into a [fie]ry furnace.

JA1 And Naqai was brought forward first.⁵² And Naqai said: “How can you execute me, when Scripture says about me, ‘and do not kill a *naqi* (= an innocent person) and a righteous person?’”⁵³ And it was said to him: “About you it was said, ‘in hiding places he (i.e., the wicked man) kills a *naqi* (= an innocent person)’.”⁵⁴ And it was ordered that he should be burned.

Heb1 R. Yehoshu‘a said to Naqi: “Why is your name called

וקדם אוולא נקיי. פקאל נקיי ואכיי תקתלוני ועלי קאל אלכתב אנ ונקי וצדיק אל תהרוג. פקיל לה עליך אוקיל במסתרים יהרוג נקי. {יהר} [...] נקי⁵⁵ פאומר בחרקה.

אמר ר' יהוש' לנקי למה נקי⁵⁶ שמך נקי. ענה {ואמ} ואמר לו עלי אמר

⁵⁰ Ps. 24.4.

⁵¹ Exod. 34.7.

⁵² Note that in JA1, the execution of Naqai comes before that of Matai.

⁵³ Exod. 23.7.

⁵⁴ Ps. 10.8.

⁵⁵ The dittography is found between end of one page and the beginning of the next one.

⁵⁶ Lege: 'נק'.

Naqi?" He answered and said to him: "About me David said 'Neqi hands'." He said to him: "Oh you fool, who fooled around and destroyed yourself! About you Moses our master said 'and He shall *naqe* not *yenaqe*'." He decreed, and they threw him into a fiery furnace.

Heb2 They said to Naqi: "Why is your name called Naqi?" He answered them and said to them: "About me David said, 'Neqi hands and a pure heart'." They answered him and said to him: "You are light(-minded) and a fool who misled (?) yourself from all living creature! Not thus said David about you, but in the Torah it is written thus, 'and He shall *naqe* not *yenaqe*'." And they ordered about him and threw him into a fiery furnace.

דויד נקי {...} כפים. א"ל אי שוטה
שנשטתיתה {ואביבת} ואבידת
לנפשך, עליך אמר משה אדונינו
ונקנה⁵⁷ לא ינקנה.⁵⁸ גזר והשליכו
בגוא אתון נורא יקד'.

ויאמרו לו לנקי למה נקרא שמך נקי
השיב אותם ואמר להם אמר <עלי>⁵⁹
דויד נקי כפים ובר לבב. ענו אתו
ואמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה אשר
הסטית נפשך מכל החיה לא כן אמר
דויד עליך כי אם בתורה כן כתוב
ונקא⁶⁰ לא ינקא.⁶¹ ויצו עליו וישליכו
אתו⁶² לתוך אתון נורא יק<י>דתא.

⁵⁷ Lege: ונקה.

⁵⁸ Lege: ינקה.

⁵⁹ The word עלי was written once again on the margins. It belongs before אמר.

⁶⁰ Lege: ונקה.

⁶¹ Lege: ינקה.

⁶² Lege: אתו.

Heb3 They said to Naqi: “Why is your name called Naqi?” He answered them and said to them: “About me David—peace be upon him—said, ‘*Neqi* hands and a pure heart, etc.’.” They answered and said to him: “You are light(-minded) and a fool who fooled all living creature! Not thus said the king (i.e., David), for in God’s Torah it is written thus, ‘and He shall *naqe* not *yenake*’.” And he ordered and they threw him into a fiery furnace.

Heb4 [And afterwards] he (i.e., Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah) brought Naqi and said to hi[m]: “Why is] your name [called] Naqi?” He (Naqi) said to him: [“About me David said], ‘*Neqi* hands and a pure he[art’.” He said to him: “Wicked person] son of a wicked person! Not th[us; about you] Moses [said], ‘and He shall *naqe* [not *yenake*’.” And he ordered] and they threw h[im into a fiery furnace].

ויאמרו לו לנקי למה יקרא שמך נקי השיב אתם ואמר להם עלי אמר דויד על' הש' ⁶³ נקי כפים ובר לבב וגו' ענו ואמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה אשר השטתה כל החיה לא כן אמר המלך כי בתורת יו' כן כתוב נקי ⁶⁴ לא ינקה ויצו וישליכו אותו אל תוך אתון נורא יקיד'

[ואחר?] הביא לנקי ואמר ל]ו למה נקרא [שמך נקי אמר לו [עלי אמר דויד] נקי כפים ובר לבב]ב אמר לו רשע] בן רשע לא כ]ן עליך אמר] משה ונקה [לא ינקה ... והשליכו א]תו

⁶³ I.e.: עליו השלום.

⁶⁴ Lege: ונקה.

Heb5 They said to the greatest among Yeshu's disciples: "Why is your name called Naqi?" He said: "Because it is written in the Torah, 'He shall be *naqi* (= exempt, and allowed to go) to his home for one year'."⁶⁵ Israel (i.e., the Jews) said to him: "You are a fool! It is not thus, but 'and He shall *naqe* not *yenaqe*'." And they decreed upon him and they threw him into the fire.

אמרו לגדול שבתלמידי ישו למה נקרא שמך נקי אמר לפי שנ' בתורה נקי יה' לביתו שנה אחת אמרו לו ישראל שוטה אתה אינו כן אלא ונקה לא ינקה וצוו עליו והשליכוהו באש

As in the case of Matai, in Ar1, Heb1, and Heb4, it is R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah who runs the interrogation and orders the execution, but in JA1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5 it is a collective 'they' who do this.⁶⁶ However, in the case of Naqi, there is no agreement between the textual witnesses concerning the biblical prooftexts adduced by both sides. Ar1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4 have Naqi adduce Ps. 24.4 in his defence, with his opponent(s) adducing Exod. 34.7 as a proof that he should be executed, but JA1 has Naqi adduce Exod. 23.7, and his opponents adduce Ps. 10.8. These are the two verses adduced as prooftexts in bt San 43a, and it thus seems probable that JA1's text reflects a revision of an earlier text in line with the Talmudic text, and

⁶⁵ Deut. 24.5.

⁶⁶ In JA1, most of the verbs are in the passive form, with Naqai as their subject, so it is impossible to know whether he was dealing with one or several opponents; but the verb תקתלני, 'you (pl.) will execute me,' points to several opponents.

that the other textual witnesses reflect an earlier form of our narrative at this point. Heb5, on the other hand, has Naqi adducing Deut. 24.5, which is not paralleled in the other textual witness, while his opponents cite Exod. 34.7, as in Ar1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb4.

All the textual witnesses agree that Naqi was burnt alive, with Ar1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and probably also Heb4 referring to being thrown into 'a fiery furnace' (אתון נורא יקידתא). This phrase is taken from the book of Daniel (see Dan. 3.6, 11, 15, 20, 21, etc.), and is likely to have been there in all the Aramaic versions of this passage. Only JA1 and Heb5 offer short paraphrases of this sentence, when they say that 'it was ordered that he should be burned' (JA1) or 'and they threw him into the fire' (Heb5). This mode of execution is of some interest, since when the Mishnah (m San 7.2) discusses execution by burning, it enjoins pressing a burning substance down the condemned person's throat, so as to burn him to death without destroying his whole body. However, the very same Mishnah also mentions a case when a woman of a priestly family was burnt alive on a pyre, which is also the punishment prescribed by Lev. 21.9.⁶⁷ It therefore is quite likely that the author behind the present scene did not deem the Mishnaic ruling important enough to have the execution of Naqi conform to it, rather than to the plain meaning of the Hebrew Bible.

⁶⁷ For a fuller discussion, see Lorberbaum (2015, 103–10).

5.7. Yeshu's Disciples: Trying and Executing Buni

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

- Ar1 [... ...] Buni. [He (Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah) said: "Why are you called Buni?" He said to him: "Because about me the Bible says, 'Israel is [*beni* (= my son), the firstborn]'.⁶⁸ [R. Ye]hosh[u'a ben Peraḥiah] sa[id to him: "Foo]! Thus says the Bible about you, 'Behold I [will kill] *binkha* (= your son), the firstbo[rn]'.⁶⁹ And it was ordered] about him and they stoned him.
- JA1 Then Buni was brought forward to be executed, and he said: "How can you execute me when about me it was said, 'Israel is *beni*, the firstborn'?" And they said to him: "About you it was said, 'Behold I will kill *binkha*, the firstborn'." And it was ordered that he should be stoned.
- Heb1 After him he (Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah) summoned Buni. He said to him: "Why is your name called Buni?" He said to him: "About me the Bible says,
- [... ...] לבוני [אמ' למה א]תקרי לך [ב]וני אמ' ליה דעלי אמ' קרא [בני בכורי] יש' א[מ' ליה ר' י]הוש[וע בן פרחיה שטי]א הכי אמר עלך קרא הנה אנכי [הרג את] בנד בכור[ך] ופקיד [עֲלוּהי ורגמוהי].
- תם קדם בוני ליקתל פקאל כיף תקתלני ועלי אוקיל בני בכורי ישראל. פקאלו לה עליך אוקיל הנה אנכי הורג את בנד בכ>ו<ריך. פאומר ברגמה.
- אחריו קרא לבוני. א"ל למה נק' שמך בוני. א"ל עלי אמר קרא בני בכרי ישראל. ענה לו אי אויל וכסיל עליך נאמר הנה אנכי הורג את בנד וגו'. [גזר] עליו ורגמוהו באבן.

⁶⁸ Exod. 4.22.

⁶⁹ Exod. 4.23.

'Israel is *beni*, the firstborn'."

He answered him: "Oh you stupid idiot! About you it was said, 'Behold I will kill *binkha*, etc.'." [He decreed] upon him, and they stoned him with a stone.⁷⁰

Heb2 After him they summoned Beni, and they said to him: "Why is your name called Beni?" He said to them: "About me the Bible says in the Torah, 'Israel is *beni*, the firstborn'." And they answered him and said to him: "You are light(-minded) and a fool of all living creatures! Not thus did it speak about you in the Torah, but it said like this, 'Behold I will kill *binkha*, the firstborn'." And it was decreed upon him, and they burned him in the fire, and Beni died in the fire.

ויקראו {את} אחריו את בני ויאמרו לו למה נקרא שמך בכ⁷¹ בני ויאמר להם עלי אמר המקרא בתורה בני בכורי ישראל. ויענו אותו ויאמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה מכל החיים לא כן דבר עליך בתורה כי אם כן אמר הנה אני הורג את בנך בכורך. ויצו עליז וישרפו באש וימת בני באש.

Heb3 After him they summoned Beni, and they said to him: "Why is your name called Beni?" He

ויקרא⁷² אחריו את בני ויאמרו לו למה נקרא שמך בני ענה עלי אמרה התורה בני בכורי ישראל. ענו ואמרו

⁷⁰ Or: 'they stoned him with stones'. For both translations, see our comments on 8.2, below.

⁷¹ These two letters, found at the end of a line, probably are an attempt to write the first two letters of the next word as a line-filler, but may also be due to a confusion with בכורי in the next line.

⁷² Lege: ויקראו.

answered: “About me the Torah
says, ‘Israel is *beni*, the
firstborn’.” They answered and
said to him: “Not thus did the
Torah speak about you. You are
light(-minded) and a fool! for
thus said the Torah, ‘Behold I
will kill *binkha*, the firstborn’.”
And they decreed, and they
burned him in the fire.

Heb4	After[wards they brought ...]	ו[א]חר [...] ⁷³
Heb5	Afterwards they summoned the third (disciple) (and said): “Why is your name called Beni?” He said to them: “About me the Bible says, ‘Israel is <i>beni</i> , the firstborn’.” They said to him: “It is not thus, but the Bible says ‘Behold I will kill <i>binkha</i> , the firstborn’.” And they decreed upon him and they stoned him.	ואח"כ קראו לג' למה נקרא שמך בני אמ' להם עלי אמ' המק' בני בכורי יש' אמרו לו אינו כן אלא אמ' המקרא הגה אנכי הרג את בנד בכוריד וצוו עליו ורגמוהו

All the textual witnesses—as well as *bt San 43a*—agree in having Buni cite *Exod. 4.22*, while his opponents cite the subsequent verse, but *Heb2/Heb3* and *Heb5* change Buni’s name to Beni, to make it better fit the pun on the Hebrew word *ben*, ‘son’. However, when it comes to Buni’s mode of execution, the textual witnesses are divided: *Ar1*, *JA1*, *Heb1*, and *Heb5* speak of stoning, but *Heb2/Heb3* follow a different route (as they already did in 5.5), and claim that he was burnt in the fire.

⁷³ *Heb4* breaks off here, and will resume in 6.14.

5.8. Yeshu's Disciples: Trying and Executing Netzer

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar5, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	And after him he (i.e., Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah) summoned Netzer. He said: "And why [is your name called Netzer?]" He said to hi]m: "For about me the Bible says, 'and a <i>netzer</i> (= sprout) will grow from its roots'." ⁷⁴ He said to him: "Fool! Thus the Bi[ble said a]bo[ut you], 'you were cast out of your tomb like a detested <i>netzer</i> (= sprout)'." ⁷⁵ And it was decreed upon him, and his head was cut off.	ובתריה קרא לנצר. אמ' ולמה [אתקרי שמך נצר. אמ' לי]ה דעלי אמ' קרא ונצר משרשיו יפר{א}>ה. אמ' ליה שטיא הכי [אמר] ע[לך] ק[רא] אתה השלכת מקברך כנצר נתעב. ופקיד עלוהי וקטים רישיה.
Ar5	[“...out of your tomb like a det]ested [<i>netzer</i> ’.” And it was decreed upon him, and they cut] his head [off].	[... מקברך כנצר נת]עב [ופקיד עלוהי וקטמו]הי לראשיה.
JA1	Then Netzer was brought forward to be executed, and he said: "How can you execute me when it was said about me 'And a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a	תם קדם נצר ליקתל. פקאל כיף תקתלני ועלי אוקיל ויצא חוטר מגזע ישי ונצר משרש יפרא. ⁷⁶ פקאלו לה עליך אוקיל ואתה השלכת>ה ⁷⁷ מקברך כנצר מתעב. ⁷⁸ פאומר בצרב רקבתה.

⁷⁴ Isa. 11.1.

⁷⁵ Isa. 14.19.

⁷⁶ Lege: יפרה.

⁷⁷ Lege: השלכת.

⁷⁸ Lege: נתעב.

netzer will grow from its roots’?” And they said to him: “About you it was said ‘And you were cast out of your tomb, like a detested *netzer*’.” And it was ordered that his neck should be cut off.

Heb1 After him he summoned Netzer. He said to him: “Why is your name called Netzer?” He answered him and said: “About me the prophet Isaiah said, ‘and a *netzer* will grow from its roots’.” He said to him: “Oh you stupid person! About you the Bible said ‘And you were cast out of your tomb like a detested *netzer*’.” He decreed upon him, and they chopped off his head with a sword.

Heb2 Afterwards they summoned Netzer, and they said to him: “Why is your name called Netzer?” And he said to them: “About me the prophet Isaiah prophesied, as it is written, ‘and a *netzer* will grow from its roots’.” And they answered and said to him: “You are (more) light(-minded) and a fool than all living creatures for speaking thus! Not thus did Isaiah speak about you, but thus—‘And you

אחריו קרא לנצר. א"ל למה נקרא שמך נצר. ענה לו ואמר עלי אמר ישעיה הנביא ונצר מש' יפרה. א"ל אי אויל עליך אמ' ק' ואתה הש' מק' כנצר נתעב. גזר עליו והתיוז את ראשו בחרב.

ואחר קראו לנצר ויאמ[ר] לו למה נקרא שמך נצר ויאמר להם עלי נתנבאה⁷⁹ ישעיה הנביא שכתוב ונצר משרשיו יפרה. ויענו ויאמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה מכל בעלי החיים {ב}שכן דברת לא כן דבר ישעיה עליך כי אם כן ואתה {השלט} השלכת מקברך כנצר נתעב ויצוו עליו וירגמוהו באבן את נצר.

⁷⁹ Lege: נתנבא.

were cast out of your tomb like a detested *netzer*’.” And they ordered concerning him, and they stoned him—Netzer—with a stone.

Heb3 After him they summoned Netzer, and they said to him: “Why is your name called Netzer?” He answered them: “About me the prophet Isaiah prophesied, ‘and a *netzer* will grow from its roots’.” They answered him: “You light(-minded) person! Not thus did Isaiah the prophet speak about you, but thus did he speak—‘And you were cast out of your tomb like a detested *netzer*’.” And they stoned him with a stone, and he died.

Heb5 Afterwards they summoned the fourth (disciple). They said to him: “Why is your name called Netzer?” He said to them: “About me the Bible said, ‘and a *netzer* will grow from its roots’.” They said to him: “You are a fool! It is not thus, but the Bible said about you ‘And you were cast out of your tomb like a detested *netzer*’.” And they decreed upon him and cut his head off.

ואחריו קראו לנצר ויאמ' לו 'נק' ש' נצר ענה להם עלי נבא ישעיה הנביא ונצר משרשיו יפרה. ענו לו קל{א} לא כן אמר ישעיה הנביא עליך <כי> כן אמר עליך ואתה הושלכת מקברך כנצר יתעב.⁸⁰ וירגמוהו באבן וימות.

ואח"כ קראו לרביעי אמרו לו למה נקרא שמך נצר {אמ'} אמ' להם עלי אמ' המק' ונצר משרשיו יפרה אמרו לו שוטה אתה אינו כן אלא אמ' המקרא עליך ואתה השלכת מקברך כנצר נתעב וצוו עליו וחתכו ראשו

⁸⁰ Lege: נתעב.

All the textual witnesses—as well as *bt San* 43a—agree in having Netzer citing Isa. 11.1 in his support, while his opponent(s) cite(s) Isa. 14.19. But they diverge when it comes to the method of execution, with Ar1, Ar5, JA1, Heb1, and Heb5 speaking of beheading, whereas Heb2/Heb3 opt for stoning. This divergence is a recurrent feature in Heb2/Heb3, as we already noted in our comments on 5.5 and 5.7.

5.9. Yeshu's Disciples: Trying and Executing Todah

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar5, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	After him they brought Todah. He (Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah) said to him: "Why is your name called Todah?" He said to him: "For about me David said, "A psalm for <i>todah</i> (= thanksgiving)". ⁸¹ He said to him: "Fool! Thus said David about you, 'He who sacrifices <i>todah</i> (= a thanksgiving offering) honors me'. ⁸² And it was decreed upon him, and they executed him.	ובתריה אתווה לתודה. אמ' ליה למה אתקרי שמך תודה. אמ' ליה דעלי אמ' דויד מזמור לתודה. אמ' ליה שטיא הכי אמ' עלך דויד זובח <תודה> יכבדנני. ופקיד עלוהי וקטלוה.
Ar3	[... "Why is your name] call[ed Todah?" He said to him: "About me] David said, "A	[למה] אתק[רי שמך תודה. אמר ליה? עלי] אמ' דויד מזמו[ר ל]תוֹדָה. [א]מַר לִיה שוטה ⁸³ , עליך

⁸¹ Ps. 100.1.

⁸² Ps. 50.23.

⁸³ Note the appearance of a Hebrew word in the midst of the Aramaic text.

psalm for *todah*’.” He said to him: “Fool! about you David said, ‘He who sacrifices *todah* honors me’.” And he decreed upon him, and they executed him.

אמר דויד זוביח תודה יכבדינני.⁸⁴
ופקיד עליה וקטלוהי.

Ar5 They brought Todah. He said to him: “Why are you called Todah?” He said to him: “About me David said, ‘A psalm for *todah*’.” [He said] to him: “Fool! D[avid said about yo]u, ‘He who sacrifices [*todah* h]onors me’.” And he decreed [upon him, and they executed (?)] him.

ואתיוהי {לתו} לתודה. א'מ' ליה למה
איתקרי⁸⁵ תודה. א'מ' ליה עלי אמוֹר
דויד מזמור לתודה. [א'מ'] ליה
שוטא⁸⁶ [ע]ל[יד אמר דוי]ד זובח
[תודה י]כבדיני ופקיד [עלוהי
וקטלו?] הִי

JA1 Then Todah was brought forward to be executed, and he said to them: “How can you execute me when about me it was said, ‘(A psalm) for *todah*’?” And they said to him: “However, about you it was said, ‘He who sacrifices *todah* honors me’.” And it was ordered that he should be executed.

תם קוד<ם> תודה ליקתל פקאל להם
כיף תקתלוני ועלי אוקיל לתודה.
פקאלו לה הם עליך אוקיל זובח תודה
יכבדנני. פאזמר בקתלה.

⁸⁴ Lege: יכבדנני.

⁸⁵ Lege: אתקרי שמך, או את קרי.

⁸⁶ Here too the word is in Hebrew, but ending with an *aleph*, to look more ‘Aramaic’.

- JA2 [... ...]. And he said to him: "You fool! Thus it said about you, 'He who sacrifices *todah* honors me'." And he decreed upon him, and he was executed.
- Heb1 After him he summoned Todah. He said to him: "Why is your name called Todah?" He said to him: "About me David said, 'A psalm for *todah*'." He said to him: "Oh you idiot! About you it was said, 'He who sacrifices *todah*'." He decreed upon him, and they executed him.
- Heb2 Then they summoned Todah, and they said to him: "Why did they call your name Todah?" He said to them: "For this (reason) they called me Todah, for about me David said, 'Come to His gates with *todah* (= thanksgiving)'."⁸⁹ They answered him and said to him: "You are light(-minded)
- [... ...] פקאל לה יא אִחְמֶק, כדי קאל עליך מן ידבֹח⁸⁷ תודה יכרמני. פאמר בה וקתל.
- אחריו קרא לתודה לשאול.⁸⁸ א"ל למה נק' שמך תודה. א"ל עלי אמר דוד מזמור לתודה. א"ל אי כסיל עליך נא' זובח תודה. גזר עליו והרגוהו.
- ואחר קראו לתודה ויאמרו לו למה קראו שמך תודה ויאמר להם בעבור כן קראוני תודה כי עלי אמר דוד באו שערי בתודה ויענו אותו ויאמרו לו אתה קל ושוטה מכל בעלי החיים כי לא אמר הכתוב עלי⁹⁰ ולא כן אמר דוד כי {אם כתוב בתורה וכי תזבחו זבח תודה. וגם כן אמר דוד זובח תודה יכבדנני. ויצו עלי ויהרגו את תודה.

⁸⁷ A later hand wrote the original Hebrew verse above the line: זובח (יכבדנני) תודה יכבדני.

⁸⁸ This word seems redundant here; it could mean 'to question [him]', but such a phrase did not appear in the previous four passages, which are all structurally identical with this one.

⁸⁹ Ps. 100.4.

⁹⁰ Lege: עליך.

and a fool of all living creatures! For Scripture did not speak about you, and not thus did David speak; rather, it is written in the Torah, 'And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of *todah* (= thanksgiving)'.⁹¹ And David too said, 'He who sacrifices *todah* honors me'." And they ordered upon him, and they executed Todah.

Heb3 After him they summoned Todah. They said to him: "Why is your name called Todah?" He answered them and said: "Thus did David say about me, 'Come to His gates with *todah*, to his courtyards with praise'." They answered and said to him: "Light(-minded)! Not thus did he say; you are light(-minded) and a fool in the world of all living creatures! And (was it) not about you that the Torah said thus, 'And when you sacrifice a sacrifice of *todah*, etc.'? 'He who sacrifices *todah* honors me'." And he ordered, and they executed Todah.

ואחריו קראו לתודה. אמרו לו למה נקרא שמך תודה ענה להם ואמר כך אמר עלי דויד בנו⁹² שעריו בתודה חצרותיו בתהלה. ענו ואמ' לו קל לא כן אמ' אתה קל ושוטה בעולם מכל החיים ולא עליך כן אמרה התורה וכי תזבחו זבח תודה וכ' זובח תודה יכבדנו⁹³ ויצו ויהרגו את תודה.

⁹¹ Lev. 22.29.

⁹² Lege: באו.

⁹³ Lege: יכבדני.

Heb5 Afterwards they summoned the fifth (disciple) (and said): “Why is your name called Todah?” He said to them: “About me David said, ‘A psalm for <i>todah</i>’.” They said to him: “Fool! It is not thus, but he said ‘He who sacrifices <i>todah</i> honors me’.” And they decreed upon him and they cut his head off.	ואח"כ קראו לחמישי למה נקרא שמך תודה אמ' להם עלי אמ' דוד מזמור לתודה אמרו לו שוטה אינו כן אלא אמ' זובח תודה יכבדנני וצויו עליו וחתכו ראשו
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All the textual witnesses except for Heb2/Heb3 agree that Todah cited Ps. 100.1 in his support, whereas his opponents cited Ps. 50.23; the same two verses are cited in bt San 43a. But Heb2/Heb3 have Todah citing Ps. 100.4, while his opponents cite Lev. 22.29 in addition to Ps. 50.23. And all the textual witnesses agree that he was executed, with the sole exception of Heb5, which claims that his head was cut off, probably a duplication of Netzer's fate in the previous passage.

5.9a. Yeshu's Disciples: Trying and Executing Noqev

Textual witnesses: Heb5

Heb5 Afterwards they summoned the sixth (disciple) (and said): “Why is your name called Noqev?” He said to them: “About me the Bible says, ‘<i>Naqeva</i> (= name) your wages upon me, and I will give them’.”⁹⁴ They said to him:	ואח"כ קראו לששי למה נקרא שמך נוקב אמ' להם עלי המקרא אומ' נקבה שכרך עלי ואתנה אמרו לו שוטה אינו כן אלא אמ' המקרא עליך ונוקב שם י"י מות יומת וצויו עליו וסקלוהו באבנים עד שמת והששה האחרונים הרגו אותם בסיף עד שתמו כולן
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⁹⁴ Gen. 30.28.

“Fool! It is not thus, but the Bible said, ‘And one who *noqev* (= pronounces) the Name of the Lord shall surely be executed’.”⁹⁵ And they decreed upon him and they stoned him with stones until he died. And the last six (disciples) they killed with a sword until they were all gone.

Heb5 (and Heb6) are unique in describing the fate of a sixth disciple, called Noqev. His inclusion is explained by the statement that appears earlier in their text, that Yeshu and his teacher Yoḥanan had twelve disciples, ‘six of which (were) laymen, and six magicians’ (ששה מהם הדיוטים וששה מהם מכשפים).⁹⁶ This version therefore narrates how the six magicians were executed, and then adds that the remaining six disciples were killed by the sword.

The verse cited by Noqev is Gen. 30.28, and his opponents respond with Lev. 24.16, and Noqev is stoned to death, just like Buni, but the author of this passage chose a different verb here, replacing the verb רגם used for Buni’s execution with סקל באבנים for Noqev.

⁹⁵ Lev. 24.16.

⁹⁶ See JTS 6312, fol. 68r. For this claim, see also above, in our comments on 4.5.

6.0. Yeshu, Yoḥanan, and Tiberinus Caesar

Having dispensed with Yeshu's disciples, the narrative now returns to the main culprits, namely, Yeshu and Yoḥanan. And as we are nearing the climax of the entire narrative, the identity of the person running the proceedings shifts, from Pilatus the governor to King Tiberinus Caesar himself.

6.1. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Pilatus' Question to Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar5, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	Pilatus the governor answered R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah: "The five disciples of Yeshu the wicked who misled the wo[rl]d have been executed, and Yoḥanan the Dyer—Yeshu's teacher—and he (Yeshu) deserve to be executed."	מתיב פילטוס הגמונא לר' יהושע בן פרחיה חמשה תלמידיו דיישו רשיעא דאטעו ע[ל]מא איתקטילו ויוחנן מצבענא רביה דיישו ואיהו חיבין קטלא.
Ar3	Aglitus the governor answered and said to Yehoshu'a ben Pera[hia]h: "The five disciples of Yeshu were exe[cuted]; Yeshu the wicked and Yoḥanan, who mi[sl]ed the people—what execution do they deserve?"	מתיב אגליטוס הגמונאה ¹ ואמר ליהושוע בן פר[חי]ה חמשה תלמידיו דישו איתק[טי]לו ישו רשיעא ויוחנן דאט[עי]או עמא מאי קטלא חיבין.

¹ This word is highlighted by a series of markings below it, perhaps as a sign that it should be deleted, and cf. above, Figure 2.

- Ar5 P[ilatus the governor] answered [Yehoshu'a] and [said: "The five disciples] of Yeshu were executed, and Yeshu the wicked and Yoḥanan, who misled the people—what execution do they deserve?"
- JA1 When the five disciples were executed, the governor said to Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah: "You have executed the disciples who are branches. Execute Yoḥanan and Yeshu who are (the) roots."
- JA2 Pelitus the governor answered and said to R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah: "These five disciples of Yeshu the heretic who is misleading the world have been executed, and Yoḥanan the Dyer, Yeshu's teacher, and Yeshu (himself) deserve to be executed."
- Heb1 Then when Pilatus the governor saw (this), he said to R. Yehoshu'a: "Yeshu's disciples have already been killed—except those who ran away. Now, Yeshu the wicked and Yoḥanan his teacher, who caused all this—which death do they deserve?"
- מ<י>תִּיב פִּילְטוֹס הַגְּמוּנָא לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ
וְ[אִמְרַת חֲמִשָּׁה תַלְמִידָיו] דִּישׁוּ
אִיתְקַטְּלוּ יֵשׁוּ רִשְׁיָעָא וַיּוֹחֵן {דָּאט}
דָּאטְעִיאוּ עִמָּא מֵאִי קְטֹלָא חִיבִין.
- פִּלְמָא קְתָלוּ אֲלַכְמַס אֶלְתִּלְאֲמִיד קָאֵל
אֲלַקְאִיד לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה קֵד
קְתַלְתָּם אֶלְתִּלְאֲמִיד אֱלֹהִים² פְּרוּעַ
אֶקְתָּלוּ יוֹחָנָן וִישׁוּ אֱלֹדֵי הֵם אֲצוּל.
- אֶסְתַּג' אַב פִּלְיטוֹס אֲלַקְאִיד וְקָאֵל לִר'
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה הָאוּלִי אֱלֹה'
תִּלְאֲמִיד יֵשׁוּ אֲלַפְאֶסְק מִצַּל אֲלַכְלַק
קְתָלוּ וַיּוֹחֵן אֲלַצְבָּאגְ מַעֲלָם יֵשׁוּ וִישׁוּ
אֶסְתַּגוּ' בּוּ אֲלַקְתָּ [ל].
- אַז כְּשִׂרָאָה פִּילְטוֹס הַהִגְמוֹן אִמ' לִר'
יְהו[ש'] כְּבַר תַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל יֵישׁוּ נִהְרְגוּ
זוֹלַת שֶׁב<ר> חו. עֵתָה יֵישׁוּ הִרְשָׁע
וַיּוֹחֵן רַבּוֹ שֶׁהֵן הַגְּרִימוּ כָּל זֹאת אִי זֶה
מִיתָה הֵם חִיבִים.

² Lege: אֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹדֵי הֵם (a late form, which would be a bit unexpected here); or, perhaps: אֱלֹה' וְהֵם.

- Heb2 After this Petalus the governor said to Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi and to Marinus the elder of the Jews and to the crowds of people: "The disciples of Yeshu'a the wicked have been killed. And now, what shall we do with those whose names are Yeshu'a and Yoḥanan? What shall we judge concerning them, and what do they deserve by law...?"
- Heb3 After this Pelatus the governor said to Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah the Nasi and to Marinus the elder of the Jews and to the crowds of people: "The disciples of Yeshu'a the wicked have been killed. And now, what shall we do with those whose names are Yeshu'a and Yoḥanan, and what shall we judge concerning them, and what do they deserve by law and by trial?"
- אחרי כן אמר פטלוס השר לרבי יהושע בן פרחיה הנשיא ולמרינוס זקן {ושל} שליהודים ולקהילות בני אדם את³ תלמידי ישוע הרשע נהרגו. ועתה מה נעשה באלה אשר שמם ישוע ויוחנן מה נשפוט עליהם ומה יתחייבו⁴ מן הדין...⁵
- אחר כן אמר פלטוס השר לר' יהושע בן פרחיה הנשיא ולמרינוס זקן שליהודים ולקהלת בני האדם את תלמידי ישוע הרשע נהרגו ועתה מה נעשה באלה אשר שמם ישוע ויוחנן ומה נשפוט עליהם ומה נתחייב⁵ מן הדין והמשפט.

³ This word is superfluous, unless we emend to נהרגו.

⁴ Lege: יתחייבו.

⁵ A few words were omitted from the text between the end of this passage and the beginning of the next one.

Heb5 After this Pelites the governor said to R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah: "The disciples of Yeshu the wicked have been killed; Yeshu the wicked and Yoḥanan the Dyer, who misled the world—they too deserve to die."	ואח"כ אמ' פליטס השר לר' יהושע בן פרחיה תלמידיו שלישו הרשע נהרגו ישו הרשע ויוחנן הצבע שהתעו את העולם גם הם חייבים מיתה.
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All the textual witnesses agree in having Pilatus initiate the next stage of the proceedings, now that Yeshu's disciples have been executed. In Ar3, Ar5, Heb1, and Heb2/Heb3 this is framed as a question (what manner of execution do Yoḥanan and Yeshu deserve?), but in Ar1, JA1, JA2 and Heb5 he merely states that they too deserve to die. In Ar3 and Ar5, he refers to Yoḥanan and Yeshu as those who 'misled the people', but in Heb5 he refers to them as those who 'misled the world'. The reading in Ar1 is uncertain, but as JA2 is a literal translation of the text of Ar1, it is quite likely that the reconstruction ע[ל]מא in Ar1 is correct, especially as in the next passage (6.2) Ar1 will once again say that they 'misled the whole world'. The texts' wavering between עלמא and עמא is something we already noted above, in our comments on 1.1 (and cf. our comments on 4.2), and, as we noted there, the reading עמא probably is the earlier reading.

Ar3 refers to Pilatus as 'Aglitus the governor' (אגליטוס), but the word הגמונא is both misspelled (with an extra ה at the end, i.e., two Aramaic definite articles in succession), and marked with a series of small signs, probably signifying that the scribe thought it should be deleted. This may be due to the scribe's knowledge that the governor was called Pilatus, and his assumption that 'Aglitus', who already appeared earlier in his

text (see above, 4.3), is a different person. JA1 uses the typical Muslim terminology of *אצול*, ‘roots’, and *פרוע*, ‘branches’, as in the distinction between *أصول الفقه*, ‘the sources of Islamic law’, and *فروع الفقه*, ‘the branches of Islamic law’.⁶ This is a recurrent phenomenon in JA1, as we noted in our discussion of this textual witness in section II.1.6 of the Introduction. Heb1 adds a brief reference to the disciples who escaped, as a reminder to what we read in 5.2. And as in many other passages, Heb2/Heb3 expand on the text found in the other textual witnesses, but the added verbiage merely repeats what was already said in the shorter texts.

Ar1, Ar3, and Ar5 all agree in calling Yeshu *רשיעא*, ‘the wicked’, and this epithet recurs later in the Aramaic texts (see below, 6.9–6.12, 7.2, 7.7, etc.), and probably occurred in the parts that are not preserved in the Aramaic fragments we currently have. It is reflected in the frequent appellation of Yeshu as *הרשע* in the Hebrew textual witnesses (see above, 1.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.4, etc.), but is less common in the Judaeo–Arabic texts (see *אלפאסס* in JA2 here and in 8.3, and *אללעין* in JA1 in 8.3), probably because in the Muslim world Jesus was seen as one of the pre-Islamic prophets (see above, section II.1.6 of the Introduction). It is also attested to by Amulo, who says that the Jews claim that Jesus was ‘an impious man, and the son of an impious man’ (*impium et filium impii*), as well as by Harkavy-A, where Yeshu is addressed as *רשיעא בֶּר רשיעא*.⁷ The frozen form *ישו רשיעא* probably

⁶ See, for example, Soufi (2018). I am grateful to Miriam Goldstein for discussing this point with me.

⁷ For the former citation, see our comments on 3.2. For the latter, see section II.2.1 of the Introduction.

was coined quite early, as a phonetically similar (esp. given the weakening of the gutturals in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and the similar pronunciation of *het* and *‘ayin*), but derogatory, counter-balance to the *ישוע משיחא*, ‘Jesus the Messiah’, of the early Christians.⁸ Such derogatory appellations of Jesus must have been quite common in the first few centuries CE, and Celsus, for example, cites his Jewish source as referring to Jesus as ‘a pestilent person’ (*ὄλεθρος*).⁹

6.2. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Sending an Embassy, or a Letter, to Tiberinus

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar5, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	R. Yehoshu‘a answered and said to Pilatus: “If our master wishes, we shall send and inform [Tibe]rinus Caesar and whatever he shall tell us, we shall do.” They sent to him: “There are seven men here, who misled the whole world and such is their business”—everything they had been doing.	מתיב ר' יהושע וא[מ'] לפילטוס אם צבי מרנא נישלח ונודעיה ל[טב]רינוס קיסר והיכ[י ד]יימר לנא נעביד שלחן ליה הכא שבעה גוברין דאטעו כולי עלמא והכי עסקיהו כוליה מה דהוו עבדין.
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⁸ In rabbinic literature, it is found in Eccl. R. 1.8, where a story about *minim* refers to ‘the donkey (or, the wine) of that wicked one’ (חמרא (דההוא רשיעא), an oblique reference to Jesus; see Hirshman (2016, 76 and 79). For the weakening of the gutturals in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, see Kutscher (1976, 67–96).

⁹ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.29.

- Ar3 They answered and said [... ...] [... ...] מתיבין ואמרין
- Ar5 They answered and said to him: מתיבין ואמרין ליה אם [יצ]בי מרנא
 “If our master [wi]shes, we נשלח ל[טב]ר'ינוס קיסר. ושלחו
 shall send to [Tibe]rinus ואודעוהי.
 Caesar.” And they sent and
 informed him.
- JA1 Yehoshu'a said: “We shall פקאל יהשוע נסתאדן פיהם אלמלך
 consult about them¹⁰ with King טברינוס קיסר.
 Tiberinus Caesar.”
- JA2 R. Yehoshu'a answered and אג'אב ר יהושוע וקאָל לפלטוס אן
 said to Pelatus: “If our master רא'י ס[י]דנא נבעת ונערף טברינוס
 wishes, we shall send and קיסר ואָלדי [...] נא >נמתתל.
 inform Tiberinus Caesar and בעתו אליה ה'ה[נ]א¹¹ [ס]בעה [...]
 whatever [he shall command] אט'ל¹² אלכלק ופעל'ו כדי וכדי גמיע
 us, we shall act accordingly.” מא כאנו יפעלוה.
 They sent to him: “There are
 [s]even [men] here, [who]
 misled the world and did so
 and so”—everything they had
 been doing.
- Heb1 R. Yehoshu'a said to him: “If א"ל ר' יהוש' אם רצון אדונינ[ו]
 our master wishes, we shall נשלח ונודיע לאדונינו טברינוס קיסר
 send and inform our master, המלך. ושלחו והודיעו לו.
 King Tiberinus Caesar.” And
 they sent and informed him.

¹⁰ Or: ‘We shall ask permission about them (i.e., to execute them)’.

¹¹ The reading is doubtful, but parallels Ar1's הכא. For ההנא see also below, JA1, at 8.1.

¹² I.e., أضلوا. Here and below (8.5 and 8.7), JA2 uses 'ט to transliterate both ض and ظ.

- Heb2 "...but we will not try (them) until we send to King Tiberinus Caesar that we caught people who were dealing with magic— (and) now command (us) what to do to them." And they sent a messenger to him.
- Heb3 They answered and said: "We will not try them until we send to King Tiberinus Caesar and tell him that we caught people who were dealing with the law (?) of magicians; (and) now, what do you command that we do with them?" And they sent a messenger to him.
- Heb5 He said: "If our master wishes, we shall send and inform King Tiberinus Caesar, and then we will try them. Immediately they sent a written message to Tiberinus Caesar and said: "We inform the king that the magic of Yeshu and his teacher Yohanan and his twelve
- 13... אבל אנחנו לא נשפוט עד אשר נשלח אל המלך טברינוס קיסר. כי נפסנו¹⁴ אנשים אשר היו עוסקים בכשפים עתה צוה מה נעשה להם וישלחו אליו מלאך.
- ענו ואמרו אנחנו לא נשפוט אתם עד אשר נשלח אל המלך טברינוס קיסר ויאמר¹⁵ לו. כי תפשו את אנשים אשר היו עוסקים במשפט מכשפים עתה מה תצוה שנעשה בהם. וישלחו אליו מלאך.
- אמ' אמרצין¹⁶ לרבנן¹⁷ נשלח ונהודע ית טברינוס קיסר המלך ואח"כ נידון אותם. מיד שלחו כתב לטברינוס קיסר ואמרו הודענא למלכא שנמצאו כשפנות ישו ויוחנן רבו ושנים עשר תלמידיו ונתחיבו תלמידיו מיתה שהתעו כל העולם בכישופם¹⁸ שבידיהם וישו ויוחנן רבו אסרנום בבית הסוהר עד דנהודע לך מלכא

¹³ A few words were omitted from the text here.

¹⁴ תפסנו: Lege.

¹⁵ Lege: ונאמר.

¹⁶ Lege: אם רצון, as in Heb1. Heb6 has: ציק, which is even more corrupt.

¹⁷ Lege: לרבנו.

¹⁸ Lege: בכישופים. Heb6 has: בכשופם.

disciples has been discovered, והוא ישלח עלינו כתב ונעשה עמהם
 and his disciples deserved to be דין.
 executed for misleading the
 whole world with their
 magic;¹⁹ and we imprisoned
 Yeshu and his teacher Yoḥanan
 in jail, until we inform you, the
 king, and he (i.e., you) will
 send us a written message and
 we will execute a judgment
 upon them.”

Following Pilatus’ question, or statement, in the previous passage, Ar1, JA1, JA2, Heb1, and Heb5 have R. Yehoshu‘a answering him, but Ar3, Ar5, Heb3, and probably also Heb2 have a plural ‘they’—presumably, R. Yehoshu‘a, Marinus, and perhaps also Yehudah the gardener—who answer Pilatus. All the textual witnesses agree in having Pilatus’ Jewish interlocutors saying that the issue should be referred to Tiberinus Caesar, as this is a necessary prelude to the long scene in which Tiberinus tests Yeshu and Yoḥanan.

One striking difference between the textual witnesses is that Ar5, JA1, and Heb1 do not provide any details about the message sent to Tiberinus, whereas Ar1 and JA2 devote a whole sentence to the contents of the message. In Ar1 and JA2 (which again offers a verbatim translation of the text of Ar1), the text refers to seven persons, i.e., Yeshu, Yoḥanan, and their five disciples, even though these five disciples had already been executed.²⁰ Thus, if

¹⁹ Lit., ‘with the magic that is in their hands’.

²⁰ And Heb5 ‘corrects’ the text, so as to speak of twelve disciples.

we are right in assuming that the scene with Yeshu's five disciples was interpolated into an earlier version where it did not yet appear (see our comments on 5.4), then that earlier version would have made no reference to the seven culprits, and probably had the shorter text at this point. And as often is the case, Heb2/Heb3, as well as Heb5, have more to say about the message sent to Tiberinus, and Heb5 even claims that it was a written message. It is possible, but not very likely, that whoever revised that text was dimly aware of the many Christian attempts to provide the 'authentic' letter that Pilate supposedly sent to Tiberius.²¹

6.3. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Bringing Yeshu and Yoḥanan to Tiberinus

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar5, Ibn Shaprut (=IS), JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	[When] King Tiberinus Caesar [he]ard, he sent: "Bring them to me!" And they brought them to him. And Aligus (?) the governor and Marinus the great elder, [and R.] Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and Rabbi [Yehud]ah	וּכְדֵשׁ] מֵעַ טְבֵרִינוֹס קִיסָר מַלְכָּא שְׁלַח אִיתִינוֹן קְדָמִי. וְאוּבְלִינוֹן לְוִיתָהּ ²² . וְאִזְ[לוֹ] עֲמָהוֹן אֶלְיָגוֹס ²³ הַגְמוּנָא וּמְרִינוֹס סְבָא רַבָּא [וְר'] יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְרַבִּי [יְהוּדָה] גִּגְנָא לְטַבְרִיָּא מְדִי[נָה] תָּא רַבְתָּא. וְאִזְלוּ כּוֹלְהוֹן לְקַמִּי טְבֵרִינוֹס קִיסָר.
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²¹ For the claim that Pilate sent such a letter, see Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.24 and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2.1–2; for the apocryphal letter of Pilate to Tiberius, known as the *Anaphora Pilati*, see Ehrman and Pleše (2014, 267–71).

²² Lege: לוֹתִיָּה.

²³ The reading is uncertain. A reading טוֹס [פִּיל]טוֹס, as suggested by Horbury (1970, 117), is possible, but note Ar1's אֶלְיָגוֹס in 9.3.

- the [gardener] we[nt] with
them to Tiberias, the great
town. And they all went before
Tiberinus Caesar.
- Ar5 And when Tiberi[nus] Caesar
heard, he said to them: “B[ring
them] to m[e!]” And [... ...]
- IS ...²⁵ Pilatus the governor and R.
Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and
Marinus the great elder of the
Jews and Rabbi Yehudah the
gardener and Yoḥanan the
Dyer²⁶ and Yeshu son of
Pandra went to Tiberias,
before Tiberinus Caesar.
- JA1 When they consulted him about
their matter the king brought
them to his presence and with
them the governor, and
Marinus the elder, and
Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and
Yehudah the gardener.
- וכד שמע טברי[נוס] קיסר א'מ' להון
א[יתינון] לקדם[וי] ו[... ...]²⁴
- ...אתא פילאטוס הגמונא ור' יהושע
בן פרחיה ומרינוס רבא²⁷ רבה די
יהודאי²⁸ ור' יהודה גננא ויוחנן בן
מטענא²⁹ וישו בן פנדרא לטיבריא
קמי דטברינוס קיסר.
- פל>א<מא אסתאדנוה פי אמרהם
אחצרהם אלמלך חצרתה ומעהם
אלקאיד ומרינוס אלשיך ויהשוע בן
פרחיה {=} ויה>דה אלגנן.

²⁴ Ar5 breaks off here.

²⁵ Ibn Shaprut begins his paraphrase of the Aramaic text at this point.

²⁶ For our translation, see our note on the Aramaic text of Ibn Shaprut.

²⁷ Lege: סבא.

²⁸ T-S K 17.5 has: סבא רבא ביהודה (!) ומרינוס קיסר.

²⁹ This also is the reading of T-S K 17.5, and is also cited in Kraus (1902, 146). Abner-Alfonso is likely to have written ‘the Dyer’, as in the Aramaic texts, but Ibn Shaprut may have modified it to ‘the son of the deceiver’.

- JA2 When King Caesar heard about this, he ordered that both of them be sent to him. And they were sent, and with them Pelitus the governor and Marinus the great elder and R. Yeho[sh]u'a ben Peraḥiah and R. Yehoshu'a (!) the gardener, to Tiberias the great town. And everyone came before Tiberinus Caesar.
- Heb1 When Tiberinus heard (this), he sent and said to them: "Take Yeshu and Yoḥanan his teacher and come before me." And they all went before King Tiberinus and said (?) to him.
- Heb2 He sent to them and answered them that: "Send them to me!" And they rose and sent [Yeshu'a the wicked and Yo]ḥanan the Dyer before King Tiberinus Caesar. And R. Yehoshu'a and Marinus and Petalus and crowds also went with them.
- ולמא סמע בדלך אלמלך קיסר אמר
באן ידפעא לחצ'רתה. פדפּעאַ
ומע[ה]מאַ פליטוס אלקאיד ואלשיך
אלכביר מרינוס ור' יהו[ש]ע בן
פרח[י]ה ור' יהושע³⁰ אלבסתנבאני
אלי טבריה אלמדינה אלכבר. וחצ'ר
אלגמיע בין³¹ ידי טברינוס קיסר.
- וכששמע טברינוס שלח ואמר להם
קחו לישו וליוחנן רבו ובואו לפני.
ואזלו כולהון קדם טברינוס המלך
ומגידו ליה.³²
- וישלח אליהם ויענה אותם כי שלחום
אלי ויקומו וישלח[ו] ל[ישוע] הרשע
וליו[חנן] הצובע לפני טברינוס קיסר
המלך. וגם הלכו עמהם ר' יהושע
ומרינוס ופטלוס ואכלוסים.

³⁰ An error for יהודה?

³¹ The lacuna seems too large for אלג[אנ]בין; a reading אלג[ומהו]בין is possible, but not supported by the visible remains of the missing letters.

³² The last six words are in slightly garbled Aramaic, rather than in Hebrew. The words ומגידו ליה seem out of place here, and as Heb1 omits the next passage, the text probably is corrupt.

- Heb3 He sent to them and answered them that: “You sent to me concerning magicians; send them to me!” And they sent to him Yeshu‘a and Yoḥanan, to King Caesar. And Yehoshu‘a and Marinus and Pelatus and the crowds also went with them.
- Heb5 When Tiberinus Caesar heard (this), and saw the written message that Pelitus the governor and R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and Morinus the elder and all the Sages of Israel had sent, he immediately sent and said to them: “Bring them before us.” And they brought them before him. And they all came before Tiberinus Caesar.
- וישלח אליהם ויען אתם כי שלחתם אלי בשביל מכשפים תשלחו אתם אלי. וישלחו אליו את ישוע ואת יוחנן לפני קיסר המלך וגם הלכו עמהם יהושע ומרינוס ופלטוס והאבלוסים.³³
- וכאשר שמע {טברינוס}³⁴ טברינוס קיסר וראה את הכתב ששלח פליטוס השר ור' יהוש' בן פרחיה ומורינוס סבא וכל חכמי ישראל מיד שלח ואמר להם הביאום לפנינו והביאום לפנינו ובאו כולם לפני טברינוס קיסר.

All the textual witnesses agree that when Tiberinus heard the story, he asked that Yeshu and Yoḥanan be brought to him, which indeed happened. They also state that Pilatus (or Aligus, if our reading of Ar1 is correct), Marinus the great elder, Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and Rabbi Yehudah the gardener also came before Tiberinus, but Heb2/Heb3 and Heb5 omit Yehudah, whereas Heb1 states this paraphrastically—and in Aramaic!—as ‘and they all went before King Tiberinus’, but Heb5 has both the list of names and the general statement. Heb2/Heb3, and perhaps

³³ Lege: והאובלוסיים, and cf. the same error in 5.3.

³⁴ This is the *custos* at the end of a page, whence the duplication of this word.

also JA2, also mention the presence of ‘crowds’ (אבלוסיים), for which see above, 1.3), and Heb5 includes ‘all the Sages of Israel’ as signatories to the letter sent to Tiberinus, and will mention the Sages again in 6.13 and 8.10 (for the appearance of the Sages in Heb3, see above, 1.3).

Ar1 and JA2 (which again follows Ar1 quite closely), as well as Ibn Shaprut, mention Tiberias as the place to which the protagonists move. That our narrative assumes that Tiberinus resides in Tiberias is something we already noted (see above, 1.2), but in this case the reference to the move to Tiberias may imply that the trial of the five disciples took place somewhere else, but no mention is ever made of another location (and cf. our comments on 7.1). In fact, both Pilatus and Tiberinus seem to operate from Tiberias, or from Ḥammat Tiberias, and the shift of location would only have involved a move from Pilatus’ headquarters to those of Tiberinus.

6.4. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Tiberinus Interrogates Yeshu and Yoḥanan

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, JA2, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5 (this passage is omitted in Heb1)

Ar1	And when [Yoḥanan] the Dyer and Yeshu [came] before him, [Tiber]inus Caesar said to them: “What is [your] business [and who are you?]?”	ולכן ... יוחנן מ[צבענא ויישו לקמיה אמר להו[ן טבר]ינוס קיסר מאי עסקיכ[ון ...].
IS	He said to them: “What are these deeds that you do?”	אמ' להם ³⁵ מאן הלין עובדי דעבדתיהו.

³⁵ T-S K 17.5 has להון, i.e., לון.

- JA1 And when Yoḥanan and Yeshu were present before the king, the king said to them: “Who are you and what is your profession?” פלמא חצרו יוחנן וישו בחצרת אלמלך קאל להם אלמלך איש אנתם ואיש צנעתכם.
- JA2 And when Yoḥanan the D[ye]r and Yeshu [came] before Caesar, he said [to them] ולמא א[...][ו] יוחנן[?] אל[צב]אג וישו לחצ'ר[ה] ק'י[סר] קאל[] [... ...]
- Heb2 When he (i.e., Tiberinus) saw them, he said both to Yeshu'a and to Yoḥanan: “What are your doings, and who are you?” כאשר ראה אותם [א]מ' לישוע וליוחנן {שה} שניהם מה מעשיכם ומי אתם.
- Heb3 When he saw (them), he said to Yeshu'a the wicked and to Yoḥanan: “What are you, and what are your doings?” כאשר ראה אמר ל'שוע הרשע וליוחנן מה אתם ומה מעשיכם.
- Heb5 When they came there, the queen (i.e., Queen Helena?) asked Yeshu and Yoḥanan: “What are these (things) that you are doing?” וכאשר באו שמה שאלה המלכה לישו ויוחנן מה אלו³⁸ אתם עושים.

Most of the textual witnesses agree in having Tiberinus ask Yeshu and Yoḥanan who they are and what they do, a question that echoes the questions posed to Yeshu by Pilatus in an earlier scene

³⁶ It is not clear whether there is another (small) letter between the two *nun* letters.

³⁷ Lege: שאל המלך, but Heb6 too reads שאלה המלכה. Later, Heb5 and Heb6 refer to Tiberinus as מלכא, and this Aramaic form may have given rise to the erroneous translation מלכה. But the text may also be referring to Queen Helena, as will be noted below.

³⁸ Heb6 has: זו.

(see above, 3.1 and 3.5). Heb1 omits Tiberinus' question, and immediately turns to Yeshu and Yoḥanan's description of their actions and powers, in the next passage.

Heb5 is an amalgamation of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* with a 'Helena' text, and the shift from 'king' to 'queen' may be due to an error of translation (see the footnote ad loc.), but may also be due to the unconscious influence of the 'Helena' text upon one of the copyists of this text. That it is not a mere *lapsus calami* is made clear in the next passage, where Heb5 again refers to 'her' rather than to 'him'.

6.5. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Yeshu and Yoḥanan Boast to Tiberinus about Their Great Powers

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	They answered and said to him that "We ar[e] the sons of the G[od] of Heaven; and [thes]e boo[k]s that are in our hand are not ours." He said to them: "And where are they from?" [They said to hi]m: "They are [books of] heal[ing], and every person who needs healing, we he[al] him, and if [we want] to revive [we revive and if we want] to kill we kill, and	מתִּבִּין ואִמְרִין לִיה דִּאֲנַח[נָא] בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים דְּשִׁמְיָא וְסִיפ[רִין] אִילָן דְּבִידְנָא לְאֹ דִּילְנָא אִינוּן. אִמְרִי לְהוֹן וּמִנְן אִינוּן. [אִמְרִין לִי] הָ יִתְנָן... ³⁹ דְּאִסּוּן[תָּא] אִינוּן וְכָל אִינֶשׁ דְּבַעֵי אִסּוּתָא מִסִּי[נָא] יִתִּיה וְאִי... [לְ]אֲחָאָה אִי... [לְ]אֲמִיתָנָא וְכָל מִיּוֹדֵי דְּבַעֵינָא לְמַעְבַּד עֲבִידְנָא... [עֲקָרָא] רָא דְּלֹא אִוְלִידִת וּמַעֲיָקָא יְכִילְנָא לְמִיתָן [לְ]הָ וְלֹד בְּלֹא גִבְרִי. וְאִי מִן דְּ[... ...] לְאִפְקָא רוּחִיה וְאִם בַּעֵי לְמַמַּת לְחִישְנָא לִיה... [לְ]הָ
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³⁹ The correct reading probably should be בִּיתְבִּי, vel sim.

everything we want to do—we do. [And a] barren [woman] who did not give birth and is suffering—we can give her a child (even) without (intercourse with) a man. And also, whoever his soul [is about] to come out, and if he is about to die, we whisper [in his ear? and...]. And if we want to...⁴⁰

Ar3 “[We are the... of the Go]d of hea[ven, and the books that are?] in our hand are (books) of healing.” [He answered]⁴³ and said to them: “What healing [is in them?]” They said to him: “Every healing that our master wishes. And also a woman who is barren, who did not give birth—we can give her a child without (intercourse with) a man.”

[... ...] אי אם בעינא לא'ם בחנא
טבא איתיה⁴¹ [... ...] אמרנא ...
[... לעול[... ...] אלין [... ...] אא⁴²

[... אל]הא דשמ[יא] בידנא
דאסותא א[י]ג[ו]י. [מתיב]⁴⁴ ואמ'
להון מאי אסותא [אית? בהו?].
אמרו ליה כל אסותא דבעי מרנא.
ואף אתתא דעקירא⁴⁵ דלא ילדה
יקלינן למיתן להולד⁴⁶ בלא גברא.

⁴⁰ The text of the rest of the sentence is entirely corrupt.

⁴¹ The reading of the last few words probably is wrong, but the text is utterly effaced; it probably dealt with making grass grow, as in JA2.

⁴² The text of Ar1 is so lacunose at this point that it is impossible to say where 6.5 ends and 6.6 begins.

⁴³ Or: '[Caesar answered]'.

⁴⁴ Or: [מתיב קיסר].

⁴⁵ Or: דעקרא.

⁴⁶ The scribe wrote להולד as a single word, and the vocalisation was added to help the reader realise that these are two separate words.

- IS They said to him: “We are the sons of God, and we wound and we heal,⁴⁷ and whoever is dying, we whisper to him and he lives, and a woman that did not give birth—we make her pregnant without a man.”
- JA1 They said to him: “We are friends of the Master of Heaven and these books that are with us came down upon us from Heaven and with them we can achieve every goal—we heal the sick, we kill the living and revive the dead, and every woman who is barren—we make her become pregnant and give birth. We can even make a woman become pregnant and give birth without intercourse with a man. And we heal the chronically ill and the invalid and make raindrops fall and make plants grow and whatever we want—we do.”
- אמ' לו⁴⁸ בני אלהא אנא ומחינא ומסינא ומאן דמית לחישנא ליה וחיי ואתתא דלא ילדה מעברנא לה בלא דכר.
- פקאלו לה נחן אוליא רב אלסמא, והדה אלכתב אלדי⁴⁹ מענא נולת עלינא מן אלסמא ובהא נצל {ע>נ<מ} נעמל {=} כל <מקצוד> נשפי אלסקים ונמית אלחי ונחיי אלמית ואית אמראה כאנת עאקר נגעלהא תחבל ותלד נעם ונצל אן נגעל אלמרה תחבל ותלד מן גיר מואקעא⁵⁰ מע רגל ונברי אלזמאן⁵¹ ואלמ>ו<קעד ונחד>ר< אלקטר וננבת אלנבאת וגמיע מא נחב נפעל.

⁴⁷ For this expression, cf. Targum Onqelos to Deut. 32:39: מחינא ואף, מסינא, translating God's words ארפא ואני ארפא, 'I wounded, and I will heal'.

⁴⁸ T-S K 17.5 has אמרו ליה.

⁴⁹ Lege: אלתי.

⁵⁰ Lege: מואקעה.

⁵¹ Lege: אלזמין or אלזמן.

- JA2 The two answered and said:
 “We are the sons of the [...]
 God, and the books that were
 found in our hands are not
 ours.” King Caesar said to
 them: “And to whom do these
 books belong?” They said to
 him: “We came down from
 Heaven with them.” “And what
 is in them?” They said:
 “Medicine, and every man who
 needs treatment—we treat him
 with them, and we revive and
 kill with them, and we do with
 them everything we want. And
 also a barren woman who has
 never given birth—we c[an
 gr]ant her children without [a
 man]. And also, a man whose
 mind is sick we [whisper?...] in
 his ear in [...] he will stand on
 his feet. And also, if we want
 we make plants and grass grow
 and make rain fall down and
 do everything in the world.”
- Heb1 When they stood before him,
 Yeshu and Yoḥanan said to
 Tiberinus: “We are the sons of
 the God who created the
 heaven and the earth. And
 these books that were fou[nd]
 in our hand are books of
 medicine. A barren woman
 who never gave birth—we can
- אג'אבא קאילון נחן א[ו]לֹאד אֶלְלָהּ
 אֶלְ[...] וְאֶלְכַתֵּב אֶלְדִּי וְגִ'ד[ת] פִּי
 אִידִינָא לִיס הִי לָנָא. קֹאֵל לָהֶם קִיסֵר
 אֶלְמֶלֶךְ וּלְמֵן הָאוּלִי אֶלְכַתֵּב. קֹאֵלוּ לָה
 מִן אֶלְסִמָּא זֹלָנָא בִּהָא. וְאִישׁ פִּיהֶם.
 קֹאֲלוּ טָב, וְכֹל אֶנְסָאן יַחְתָּאג' אֵלִי
 מִעֲאֻלָּג'ה נִעֲאֻלָּג'ה בִּהֶם וְנַחֲיִי וְנַמִּית
 בִּהֶם וְנַעֲמֵל בִּהֶם גִּמִּיעַ מֵא נְרִידָה.
 וְאִיצ'א אֶמְרָא עֲאֻקֵּר לָם תֵּלֵד קֹט
 נֶקְ[דֶּר]ר[...] וְזֻקָּה אֹולָאד מִן גִּ'י[...]
 וְאִיצָא רִג'ל[ת] מִ'ק' רֹוחָה נ[...]
 [פִי אֲדִנָּה פִי [...] קֹקִי [ע] לִי רִג'לִיה.
 וְאִיצ'א אֵן אֲרִדְנָא אֶנְבַתְנָא עֲשֹׁב וְכֹלָא
 וְנִזְלֵל אֶלְמִטֵּר וְנַעֲמֵל כֹּל שִׁי פִי
 אֶלְעֵאֶלֶם.
- וכשעמד[ו] לפניו אמרו יישו ויוחנן
 לטברינוס אנו בני האלהים שברא
 את השמים ואת הא'. וספרים אלה
 שנמצא[ו] בידנו ספרי רפואות הן.
 אשה עקרה שלא ילדה מעולם אנו
 יכולין לתת לה הריון שתלד בנים
 בלא איש.

grant her a pregnancy, so that
she will give birth to sons
without a man.”

Heb2 They answered him and said to
him: “We are the sons of the
God of Heaven, and we are
dealing with the [book] of the
Torah.” Caesar said to them:
“What healing can you
perform?”⁵² They said: “We can
kill and revive, and grant
children to a woman without
intercourse (with a man).”

Heb3 They answered and said to him:
“We are the sons of God, and
we are dealing with the Torah.”
Caesar said to them: “What
authority do you have?” He
said to him: “We can kill and
revive, and grant children to a
woman without sexual
intercourse with a man.”⁵⁶

וְ[י]עֲנוּ אֹתוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ בְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנַחְנוּ וְאַנְחָא ⁵³ עוֹסְקִים
[בִּסְפִּי] ⁵⁴ רַתְּוֹרָה. וַיֹּאמֶר לֵהֶם קִיסָר
מָה רִפְאוֹת יֵשׁ בִּידְכֶם אָמְרוּ אֲנַחְנוּ
נוֹכֵל לְהַמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת וּלְתַתּוֹת בְּנִים
לְאִשָּׁה בְּלֹא שְׂכִיבָתָּ. ⁵⁵

עֲנוּ וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנַחְנוּ
וְאַנְחָנוּ עוֹסְקִי {..} בְּתוֹרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֵהֶם ⁵⁷
קִיסָר מָה רִשּׁוֹת ⁵⁸ בִּידְכֶם אָמַר לוֹ
אֲנַחְנוּ נוֹכֵל לְהַמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת וּלְתַתּוֹת
בְּנִים לְאִשָּׁה בְּלֹא שְׂכִבְתָּ זֶרַע אִישׁ.

⁵² Lit., ‘What healing is in your hand?’.

⁵³ Lege: וְאַנְחָנוּ; the form אֲנַחָא may reflect the original Aramaic form אֲנַחְנָא.

⁵⁴ The reading is uncertain; one could also read דְּ[סוֹ]ר, ‘in the secret (of the Torah)’.

⁵⁵ A word or two were omitted from the text here.

⁵⁶ Lit., ‘without the sperm of a man’.

⁵⁷ Lege: לֵהֶם.

⁵⁸ Probably an error for רִפְאוֹת, as in Heb2, and cf. Ar3’s [אִיתָּ? מֵאִי אִסּוּתָּ?]. But the reading רִשּׁוֹת, ‘authority’, is possible.

Heb5	They said to her:⁵⁹ “We are the sons of the God of Heaven, and these books that are in our hands are books of medicine. If there is a barren woman, and she did not give birth, we will make her produce sons without a man.”	אמרו לה אנחנו בני אלהא דשמיא וכתבים אלו שבידינו ספרי רפואות הם. אם יש אשה עקרה ולא ילדה אנו נעשה לה שתעשה בנים בלא איש.
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There are many differences between the textual witnesses here, which tell us much about the textual history of our narrative. Whereas Tiberinus’ question was divided in two—‘Who are you and what do you do?’—Yeshu and Yoḥanan provide a tri-partite answer, explaining (a) who they are, (b) what are the books they are using. In Ar1, Ar3, JA2 and Heb2/Heb3, Tiberinus then asks another question, but in the other textual witnesses we move directly to (c) what things they can do with these books. Let us look at each of these issues separately.

With regards to the first issue, Ar1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5 have Yeshu and Yoḥanan stating that they are the sons of the God of Heaven (Ar3 unfortunately is fragmentary at this point, but probably contained the same claim, and Heb5 gives this part in Aramaic, paralleling the text of Ar1 and reflecting the original Aramaic text here). JA1, on the other hand, has them using a common Arabic/Muslim term, attested from the Qur’an onwards, *أَوْلِيَاءُ*, which refers to ‘friends’, or ‘faithful followers’, of

⁵⁹ For Heb5’s confusion of Tiberinus with Queen Helena see our comments on the previous passage.

God, and can even be translated as ‘saints’.⁶⁰ The graphic similarity between אולאד and אוליא might explain this change, but there seems to be a theological motivation behind it, as the concept of ‘sons of God’ was deemed highly problematic in a Muslim context.⁶¹ Thus, having Yeshu and Yoḥanan claiming that they are friends of God apparently seemed to the translator or copyists behind JA1 more acceptable than having them claim to be the sons of God. Later in the narrative (see below, 6.11), we shall see another passage where Ar1, Heb1, Heb2, and Heb5 have Yeshu and Yoḥanan referring to themselves as ‘sons of God’, but JA1 changes it to ‘friends of God’, and there are other instances where Muslim theological sensitivities are reflected in JA1’s text (as noted in section II.1.6 of our Introduction). However, such qualms only highlight the fact that all the other textual witnesses do record this statement, which must have been there in the earliest Aramaic texts. This claim is clearly related to the Christian view of Jesus as the son of God, but the fact that here John the Baptist too claims to be a son of God shows once again his centrality within our text, as we already noted in our comments on 3.8.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Qur’an 10.62: *أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ*, ‘Now surely the friends of Allah—they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve’.

⁶¹ See, for example, Qur’an 112.3: *لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ*, ‘He (i.e., Allah, God) does not beget, nor was He begotten’, and Qur’an 5.18: *وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ* *وَالنَّصَارَى* *نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبُّهُ*, ‘But the Jews and the Christians say, “We are the children of Allah and His beloved”’.

The second issue in Yeshu's and Yoḥanan's response to Pilatus has to do with the origin of their books. Ar3, and probably also Ar1, as well as Heb1 and Heb5, merely state that their books are books of healing, but the Judaeo–Arabic versions follow a different course. Both JA1 and JA2 have Yeshu and Yoḥanan state that the books came down from Heaven, a claim that probably reflects the impact of the Muslim discourse about the sacred books which came down (גזל) or were brought down (אגזל) from Heaven, including the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, and finally the Qur'an itself.⁶² However, whereas JA2 has Yeshu and Yoḥanan present themselves as sons of God, who came down from Heaven with the books, in JA1 they present themselves as 'friends of God', and claim that the books were brought down from Heaven for their use. Heb2/Heb3, in their turn, have Yeshu and Yoḥanan claiming that they deal with the Torah, a claim which makes little sense within the narrative as a whole.

The third issue in Yeshu's and Yoḥanan's response to Pilatus is their great powers, with which they can perform various miracles, and here one can see a clear difference between the extant Aramaic texts. Ar3 merely states that with their books they can perform every healing that Tiberinus might ask for, and immediately moves on to the claim about making a barren woman pregnant even without sexual intercourse with a man. This is the

⁶² See, for example, Qur'an 21.4: *وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ*, 'And those who believe in what was sent down to you (i.e., to Muhammad), and what was sent down before you, and in the Hereafter, they have certainty of faith'; see Wild (1996) and Loynes (2021).

only element that is needed in order to move the plot forward, since—as we shall soon learn—it is the one thing that Tiberinus actually needs. But Ar1 provides a long list of healings—as well as other miracles—that Yeshu and Yoḥanan can perform with their books. Heb1 and Heb5 clearly follow the shorter version, and Heb2/Heb3 follow the same version with one minor addition—that Yeshu and Yoḥanan can kill and bring the dead to life. But JA1 and JA2 follow the longer version, and provide similar lists of miracles that Yeshu and Yoḥanan can perform. These include (i) healing sick people and invalids, (ii) reviving the dead and dying, (iii) killing living people, (iv) making a barren woman give birth without sexual intercourse with a man, (v) bringing down rain, (vi) making plants and grass grow, and (vii) doing whatever they wish. In this long list, the statement about barren women is embedded in the middle of the list, and it is only Tiberinus' response that will highlight this specific ability.

Looking at the list of miracles that Yeshu and Yoḥanan claim to be able to perform, we may note that some of these miracles—and especially (i) and (ii)—could be based on the Gospel stories about Jesus, while others, such as (iii) and (vii), could be based on stories found in the apocryphal gospels, but the entire list does not seem to have been 'tailor made' to suit Jesus. Rather, such miracles were typical of the Jewish (and Christian) holy men of the Second Temple period and of later antiquity, and were equally typical of those wonder-workers who often were viewed as 'magicians' by their detractors.⁶³ What is quite surprising is

⁶³ See, for example, Stratton (2007, 107–76); Bohak (2008, 20–27, 139–40, 360, 401–6); Carleton Paget (2011).

that it does not include the miracles that Yeshu will perform later in the narrative, including flying in the air (see below, 7.2), shutting a cave from the inside (7.5), and turning himself into a bird (7.7). Moreover, the one miracle which Yeshu will soon perform—namely, making a woman pregnant without her having sex with a man—may be conceived as a response to the famous Christian claims about the virgin birth. Such a claim, our narrative implies, is no proof of divinity, since any magician can perform this feat.

6.6. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Tiberinus Asks Whether They Can Make His Daughter Pregnant, and Yeshu Says Yes

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	[Caesar said... “I do not ask] of you [... ... can you grant her a son without] a man?” Yeshu answered and said: “Y[es].”	64... [.....] מינכו[ן] ... ליה א[...] בְּלֹא גִבּוֹר. מְתִיב יִישׁוּ וְאִמְ' ה[י]ן.
Ar3	When Caesar heard (this), he made fun of them. He said to them: “I have a daughter, a virgin—can you grant her children without (intercourse with) a man?” [...]	וּכְדִשְׁמַע קִיסָר הוּא מַחְאִיד עֲלֵיהֶן. אָמַ' לְהוֹן בְּרִתָּא אֵית לִי בְּתוּלְתָא יְכִלִּיתוֹן לְמִיתָן בְּה בְּנִין בְּלֹא גִבּוֹר [...]

⁶⁴ The text of Ar1 is so lacunose at this point that it is impossible to say where 6.5 ends and 6.6 begins.

- IS He (Tiberinus) said to them: “In this I will test you—I have a daughter whom no man has seen; make her become pregnant.” They said to him: “Bring her out to us.”
- JA1 When the king heard their words—and he had one daughter and he was not blessed (with offspring) except her, neither male nor female. And at that time the kings refused to marry his girl, and he yearned to see her with a male child, who would be like a son and a descendant to him, even (if he were) from his daughter.⁶⁷ So he said to them: “Everything that you mentioned I have no
- אמר להם⁶⁵ בהא מנסנא⁶⁶ לכו אית לי ברתא דלא חזי בר נש עבדוה דתתעבר אמרו ליה אפקה לקמן.
- פלמא סמע אלמלך קולהם וכאן לה אבנה ואחדה ולם יכון רוזק גיראה לא דכר ולא אנתי. וכאן פי דלך אלזאן⁶⁸ יסתנכפון אלמלוד יזוגון להם אבנה⁶⁹ וכאן ישתהי ירא להא ולד דכר ולו לאבנתה יקום לה מקאם אלולד ואלנסל. פקאל להם גמיע מא דכ>ר>תם מא בי אליה חאגה לא ישפא מריץ ולא אלמאנת⁷⁰ חי ולא אלחיי מית ולא אימט>א<ר> מט>ר>] ולא אנבאת נבאת. לכן כעלה ואחדה ממא דכרתם ארי>ד> שי⁷¹ אן ל<י> אבנה בכר מא נצ'רהא אחד הל תצלו גי מנהא ולד בלא וצול מע רגל.

⁶⁵ T-S K 17.5 has א"ל.

⁶⁶ T-S K 17.5 has מנסינא. Ibn Shaprut's phrasing of this sentence is influenced by the story in bt San 107a, where God tells David that he will test him in a matter of sexual relations (מנסינא לך בדבר ערוה), but note a similar expression in JA2, [הודא נמתחננך].

⁶⁷ The syntax of the Arabic sentence is quite cumbersome, and the exact translation is uncertain.

⁶⁸ Lege: אלזמאן.

⁶⁹ Lege: אבנתה.

⁷⁰ Lege: אלמאית or אלמאאת, for المائت?

⁷¹ The word شَيْء seems out of place here, and is ignored in the translation.

need for—neither that the sick
be healed, nor that the dying
will live, nor that the living
would die, nor making rain fall,
nor making plants grow. But
one benefit of those you
mentioned I do want. I have a
virgin daughter whom no one
has seen. Can you have a child
come from her without (her)
being with a man?” And Yeshu
said: “Yes, oh king, if only
you⁷² will show her in our
presence.”

פקאל ישו נעם יא איהו אלמלך ל[ו]
אטהרהא חצרתנא.

JA2 When Caesar heard their
words, he said to them: “We do
not want you to make the dead
live or to kill the living, nor to
make grass or plants grow nor
make rain fall, and no [thing]
in the world. But thus we will
test you [...] and she is my only
daughter, a virgin, [who saw]
no [...] man nor knew him.
Are you able to give her a son [
... ...]?”⁷³

פלמא סמע קיסר כל[א]מהם קאל
להם. ליס נריד מנכם אן תחיון
מות[א] ולא תמיתון אחיא ולא
תנבתון כלא ולוא⁷⁴ עשב ולא
ת[נ]זלון מ[ט]ר ולא [שי] פי
אלעאלם. אלא הודא נמ[ת]חנכ[ם]
ב[א]ל[ל] וחי לי בניה ואחדא⁷⁵ בכר
מא [...] רגל מרק[] ו[מ]א
ערפתה. תקדרון תעטונהא ולד [...] [...]

⁷² Lit., ‘he’, probably as a sign of respect for the king.

⁷³ JA2 breaks off here, and will resume in 8.1.

⁷⁴ Lege: ולא.

⁷⁵ Lege: ואחדה.

- Heb1 When King Caesar heard their words he mocked them and made fun of them. He said to them: "If I have a girl, a virgin maiden, in my kingdom—can you grant her children without a man?" Yeshu answered and said: "Yes."
- Heb2 When Caesar heard their words he laughed and said to them: "I have a daughter—can you grant her a daughter (!) without sexual intercourse with a man?" Both of them said to him: "Yes, we can produce a pregnancy for you."
- Heb3 When Caesar heard their words he ridiculed them. He answered and said to them: "I have a daughter—can you grant her a son without sexual intercourse with a man?" They answered and said: "We can produce offspring without sexual intercourse with a man."
- Heb5 When Caesar heard their words he made fun of them, and he said to them: "I have a daughter, a virgin—can you grant her children without a man?" Yeshu answered and said: "Yes."
- כששמע דבריהן קיסר המלך היה מהתל ומשחק עליהן. א"ל אם בת אחת נערָה בתולה יש לי במלכותי תוכלו לתת לה בנים בלא איש. ענה ישו ואמר כן.
- וכאשר שמע קיסר דבריהם צחק ויאמר להם יש לי בת התוכלו לתת לה בת בלא שְׂכִיבַת איש. [וי]אָמְרוּ לוֹ שניהם הן נוכל לעשות לך הריון.
- וכאשר שמע קיסר את דבריהם התלוצץ בהם. ענה ואמר להם יש לי בת התוכלו לתת לה בן בלא שכבת איש. ענו ואמרו נוכל לעשות הולדִין בלא שכבת איש.
- וכיון ששמע קיסר דבריהם היה משחק עליהם ואמ' להם בת יש לי בתולה יכולים אתם ליתן לה בנים בלא איש. השיב ישו ואמר הִין.

Ar3 and all the Hebrew textual witnesses agree that Tiberinus was laughing at, or making fun of, Yeshu and Yoḥanan when he asked them whether they could make his virgin daughter pregnant without a man. However, Heb1 is an exception, since it speaks of an unknown virgin maiden, rather than the king's daughter; as we shall see below, Heb1 never speaks of her as the king's daughter, but as 'the maiden'. But a much bigger difference is apparent in JA1 and JA2, where Tiberinus is not making fun of Yeshu and Yoḥanan. In both texts, Tiberinus repeats many of the claims made by Yeshu and Yoḥanan in the previous passages—which, as we saw, did not appear in Ar3 and in the Hebrew textual witnesses—and stresses that the only thing he is interested in is that they would make his virgin daughter pregnant without intercourse with a man. To this, JA1 adds a long and rather convoluted explanation as to why Tiberinus was so desperate for his daughter to become pregnant and bear him an heir to his throne. This sentence may have been there in the Aramaic text of which JA1 is a translation, but probably is a later addition to the translated text, as it is found in none of the other textual witnesses. It looks very much like an explanatory gloss, explaining why the king was so desperate to have a male offspring that he was willing to see his daughter become pregnant even though she was not yet married. Moreover, this explanation is partly paralleled in another—and admittedly late—Judaean-Arabic story, in which a visitor to a certain town is told that its king has a daughter, and has not been blessed with any (offspring) except her

(ללמלך אבנה ולם ירוק גירהא).⁷⁶ It therefore seems as if this sentence belongs more in the world of Judaeo–Arabic story-telling than in that of the Aramaic *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*.⁷⁷

In Harkavy-A, the story of Caesar’s daughter begins when Yeshu himself ‘went to King Caesar, and said to him: “Give me your daughter, and I will say words over her, and she will become pregnant and give birth to a child, and it will be a male”’ (וְאִיל לְוֹת מִלְכָּא קִיסר וְאָמַר לִיה הֵב לִי בְרִיתָךְ וְאָמַר עָלֶיהָ פְּתִיגְמִין וְתַעֲדִי וְתִלְדִּי בֶר וְהָא (דְכוּרָא), and a very similar description is found in Harkavy-B. The subsequent story in both fragments resembles the story found in our text, but also differs from it in many specific details, as we shall note below.

The story of how Yeshu made Tiberinus’ daughter pregnant without her having sexual intercourse, and how the foetus turned out to be a mere stone, was well known to Agobard. In his brief summary of the nasty stories about Jesus told by the Jews of Lyons he states that,

In the end, and because he was accused of many lies, he was thrown into jail by a decree of Tiberius, because he promised to his daughter to give birth to a male child without a man, but then placed a stone foetus inside her. (*Ad*

⁷⁶ This is found in MS St. Petersburg, RNL, Yevr.-Arab. II 1365 (#59614), a transcription of which, made by Rachel Hasson, is available on the Friedberg Genizah Project website.

⁷⁷ For the place of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts in the world of Judaeo–Arabic story-telling see Goldstein (2023, 47–66).

extremum uero, propter plura mendatia accusatum, Tiberii iudicio in carcerem reclusum, eo quod filia ipsius, cui sine viro masculi partum promiserat, lapidis conceptum intulerit.⁷⁸

For the present passage, it is the promise to make Tiberius' daughter give birth to a boy without a man that is of great importance, as it summarises well the central component of our text.

One final comment. The mountain above Tiberias is known today as Mt. Berenike. This, however, is a modern Israeli name, and its previous Arabic name was قصر بنت الملك, 'the castle of the king's daughter'.⁷⁹ On the top of the mountain there is a large church, built in the sixth century and renovated several times, until it was abandoned when the Crusaders left Palestine at the end of the thirteenth century.⁸⁰ It is not clear which king's daughter was supposed to have lived there, but I am tempted to suggest that this was a distant echo of the story of the daughter of King Tiberinus, whose sad fate is recounted in our narrative.

⁷⁸ See Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206), and Schäfer (2011, 34–35).

⁷⁹ See Hirschfeld (1994, 124), and cf. Eisenstein (1926, 138), for the account of a sixteenth-century traveller who reports that 'on the top of the highest mountain (i.e., near Tiberias) there is an old building, and it is said that this is where the palace of Caesar's daughter was' (ששם (היה ארמון לבת הקיסר), but connects it with the famous story of how Caesar's daughter kept the face of R. Yishma'el ben Elisha' after he was executed by her father (see Reeg 1985, 50*–53*).

⁸⁰ For this church, see Hirschfeld (1994) and Hirschfeld (2004, 75–209).

6.7. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Yeshu Makes Tiberinus' Daughter Pregnant

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Harkavy-A (=H-A), Harkavy-B (= H-B), Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	[... ...] Yeshu [whispered?] words of magic, and she became pregnant. [Caesar] ans[wered] and said: “[] the foetus that is in her belly—is it male or female?” Yeshu said to him: “What the king wishes, I will make it, whether male or female.”	[... ...] יישו מילין דחרשיא ואתעברת. מַתְּ[יב ...] וְאִמָּ' [] עוברא דאית במעהא דכר הוא או נוקבה. אמ' ליה יישו מאי [ד]בעי מלכא אעבִדָּה אם דכר אם נוקבה.
H-A	King Caesar gave his daughter to Yeshu, and he said words over her, and the woman became pregnant.	וַיִּהְיֶה מַלְכָּא קִיסָר יֵת בְּרִתָּא לַיֵּשׁוּ. וְאָמַר עָלֶיהָ פִּתְגָּמִין וְעֵדִיאוֹת אֵיתָתָא.
H-B	King Caesar gave his daughter to Yeshu the wicked, and he said these words over her, and the woman became pregnant.	וַיִּהְיֶה מַלְכָּא קִיסָר יֵת בְּרִתָּיה לַיֵּשׁוּ רְשִׁיעָא וְאָמַר עָלֶיהָ פִּתְגָּמִיָּא הָאֵלִיָּין וְעֵדִיאוֹת אֵיתָתָא.
IS	He (Tiberinus) ordered an orderly ⁸¹ to bring her out, and they whispered to her and she became pregnant, etc. ⁸²	צוה לפקיד לאפקה ולחישו לה ואיעברא כו'. ⁸³
JA1	He did so and brought her. And he (Yeshu) performed a miracle	פפעל דלך ואחצרהא פע<מ> בא' [ה] מן אלסחר פחבלת.

⁸¹ The word פקיד seems more like the Aramaic form of צוה than a noun, but this is also the reading in T-S K 17.5 and in Krauss (1902, 146).

⁸² Ibn Shaprut's paraphrase ends here, and will resume in 7.2.

⁸³ T-S K 17.5 has 'וכו'.

by magic and she became pregnant.

- Heb1 The king decreed, and [she was brought] before them. Yeshu approached her and said in her ears words of spells, and he spat spittle in her mouth, and she became pregnant. Caesar answered and said to Yeshu: “Now she is pregnant—what is the foetus, male or female?” He said to him: “As the king wishes, so it will be.”
- Heb2 Caesar ordered, and she was brought out to them. And they spoke in their sorcery words of magic, and he saw with what she was pregnant. And he (Tiberinus) said: “What is she pregnant with?” They said: “It is with a male son. And thus we said, that it will be male.”
- Heb3 He ordered, and she was brought to them. And they spoke in their sorcery words of magic, and Caesar saw that she was pregnant. And he said to them: “What is she pregnant with?” They said: “A male.”
- גזר המלך וה[ביאוה] לפניו. קרב אליה ישו הרשע ודיבר באזניה דברי לחישות ורק רוק בפיה ונתעברה. ענה קיסר ואמר לישו עתה נתעברה מה העובר זכר או נקבה. א"ל כרצון המלך כן יהיה.
- ויצו קיסר ויוציאו אתה אליהם וידברו בלהטיהם דברי כשפים ויראה במה⁸⁴ הרה. וי>אמר במה הרתה ויאמרו בבן זכר הוא וכן אמרנו שיהיה זכר.
- ויצו ויביאו אתה אליהם וידברו בלהטיהם דברי מכשפים ויראה אתה קיסר כי הרה היא ויאמר לה⁸⁵ במה היא הרה. אמרו בזכר.

⁸⁴ The text is corrupt, and—in light of Heb3—it is clear that several words were omitted from the text here.

⁸⁵ Lege: להם.

Heb5	Caesar commanded, and she was brought to them. And Yeshu the wicked said words of magic, and spat at her, and she became pregnant. At that moment Caesar wondered and said to Yeshu: “That with which she is pregnant—is it male or female?” Yeshu said: “As my master wishes, so it will be.”	וצוה קיסר והביאוה לפניהם ואמ' ישו הרשע דברים שלכשפנות וירק בה ונתעברה ⁸⁶ . באותה שעה תמה קיסר ואמ' לישו זה שהיא מעוברת זכר הוא או נקבה. אמ' ישו כאשר ירצה אדוני כן יהיה.
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All the textual witnesses agree that Caesar’s daughter was brought before Yeshu (in Ar1 this part is lost in a lacuna), that he (or he and Yoḥanan) performed his (or their) magic, that she became pregnant, and that there was a discussion of the child’s sex (but this part is omitted in JA1). However, there are numerous small differences between them. Ar1, JA1, Heb1, and Heb5, as well as Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B, have Yeshu performing the magic by himself, whereas Heb2/Heb3 and Ibn Shaprut use plural forms of the verbs, thus claiming that both Yeshu and Yoḥanan performed the magical procedure. When it comes to the procedure itself, Ar1 refers to ‘words (or deeds) of magic’, whereas JA1 speaks of *מִן אֱלֹסְחָר* [ה]אִי, lit., ‘a miracle of magic’; both these terms will recur in 7.2. Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B come quite close to Ar1 and JA1, reflecting their ultimate dependence on a text similar to ours, but Heb1 and Heb5 have Yeshu not only reciting spells in the maiden’s ear, but also spitting into her mouth—an action that we already encountered in Heb1

⁸⁶ Heb6 adds: באשה, which probably is an error for האשה.

and not in the other textual witnesses (see above, 2.3). In the current passage, this detail probably reflects a familiarity with the Gospel stories about Jesus, and especially the story of how Jesus healed a deaf and near-mute person by putting his fingers in the person's ears, spitting, and touching the man's tongue.⁸⁷

With regards to the child's sex, there is a greater divergence between the textual witnesses. Ar1, Heb1, and Heb5 have Tiberinus asking whether he should expect a boy or a girl as his grandchild, and Yeshu tells him that he can choose for himself. In Heb2/Heb3, Tiberinus asks the same basic question, but is told to expect a boy, and JA1 omits the entire discussion. However, Agobard seems to have heard a version in which a male child was promised (*masculi partum promiserat*; see the full citation in our comments on 6.6). Similarly, in Harkavy-A, Yeshu already promised King Caesar a male child (see the full citation in our comments on 6.6).

6.8. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Arresting Yeshu and Yoḥanan for Nine Months

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	At that moment Caesar said to Pilatus the governor: “[Let us arrest] them for nine months, until we see whether she gave birth or did not give birth. Pi[latus] went and imprisoned them for nine months.	בההיא שעתא אמ' קיסר לפילטוס הגמונא [...] יתְהוֹן עד תשע ירחי עד דניחוי אי ילדה {אי>לא>ילדה} אי לא ילדה. אזל פֿי[לטוס] ואסרינון תשעה ירחי.
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⁸⁷ Mark 7.33. For other instances in which Jesus used his own saliva to heal people, see Mark 8.23 and John 9.6.

- JA1 Then they arrested him until the end of nine months to see what will be of the maiden. And the maiden spent nine months...
- Heb1 Then King Caesar decreed to Pilatus the governor: "Place this Yeshu, and his teacher Yohanan in prison for nine months—the time of giving birth; either she will give birth, or not. And Pilatus imprisoned them for nine months.
- Heb2 At that time Caesar commanded Petalus and said to him: "Imprison them."
- תם אעתקלוה אלי תמאם ט שהו[ר] לינצר מא יכון מן אלגאריה. פקסת <א>⁸⁸ אלגאריה ט' שהור...⁸⁹
- אז גזר קיסר המלך לפילטוס ההגמון שימו לישו זה וליוחנן רבו בית⁹⁰ הסוהר עד ט' חדשים עת של לידה או תלד או לא לא.⁹¹ ואסרם פילטוס ט' חדשים.
- בעת ההיא צוה קיסר את פטלוס ויאמר לו אסור אותם.

⁸⁸ Lege: פקצת, i.e., فقضت. For JA1's confusion between ص, ض, and س, see also above, our comments on 1.1.

⁸⁹ Some words probably were omitted from the text here, and see our comments on JA1's text in the next passage.

⁹⁰ Lege: בבית. However, the interchangeability of בית and בבית is already attested in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature, and see Sharvit (2008, 65–66). I am grateful to Ohad Abudraham for this reference.

⁹¹ A dittography. For such dittographies in Heb1, see above, our comments on 0.6. The word לא might also be an error for תלד, but this seems less likely.

- Heb3 And Caesar commanded, and וצוה קיסר ויאסרו אתם עד עת נולדה
they were imprisoned until את בת קיסר.⁹²
Caesar's daughter would give
birth.
- Heb5 At that moment Caesar said to באותה שעה⁹³ אמ' קיסר לפליטוס
Pelitus the governor: "Catch השר תפסום ואסרו אותם עד תשעה
them and imprison them for חדשים ונראה מה יהיה.
nine months, and we shall see
what will happen."

All the textual witnesses agree that Tiberinus has Yeshu and Yoḥanan arrested for nine months, but diverge on the details. Ar1 and Heb1 have similar texts, and Heb5 is not far removed from them, but Heb2/Heb3 are much shorter, and JA1 is slightly corrupt.

The claim that Jesus was imprisoned by Tiberius was also known to Agobard, but, as we saw above (in our comments on 6.6), he claims that Tiberius threw Jesus into jail *after* learning that his daughter's foetus was a stone. Such a variation probably is due to the oral nature of the account that Agobard heard from his Jewish interlocutors, and need not reflect a different version of our text.

⁹² The Hebrew sentence is awkward, perhaps because of a faulty translation of the Aramaic word מולד, 'giving birth', but the intended sense is clear, and I have translated accordingly.

⁹³ Heb6 omits this word by mistake.

6.9. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: All the Jews Fast for Three Days

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Ar1 And there was great distress for Israel (i.e., for the Jews) for nine months. [R.] Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah went in secret and wrote messages and letters to all the towns where Israel were (i.e., where there were Jews), and said thus: "Decree a fast of three days, so that no man would taste food or drink, but will fast in earnest⁹⁷ before the Holy One, blessed be He, so that Israel (i.e., the Jews) would not be destroyed, and the Torah and the laws and the commandments would not be annulled, for such and such was done by Yeshu the wicked." And all the towns and places where there were Israel (i.e.,</p> | <p>והות תשע ירחי לישראל עקתא
סגיאָה. אַזל [ר'] יְהוֹשֻׁעַ [ע] בִּן פֶּרְחִיָּה
בִּסְתֵּרָא וּכְתַב כְּתָבִי וְאִיגְרִי בְּכֻלּוּהִי
מְדִינַתָּא דְּהוּוּ בִּהוּוּ⁹⁴ יֵשׁ וְאִמ' הֲכִי
גִזְרִי תַעֲנִיתָא תִּלְתָּא יוֹמֵי דְלֹא
לִיטְעוּס אִינִישׁ מִיכְלָא⁹⁵ וְלֹא
מִ<שְׁתִּיא אֱלֹא דְתַעֲנִי⁹⁶ בְּלִיבָא
שְׁלִימָא קִמִּי קב"ה וְלֹא לִיבְדוּ יֵשׁ וְלֹא
לִיבְטִיל אִוְרִיָּה וְנִימוּסֵי וּמִצְוֹתָא דִּהֲכִי
וְהֲכִי פְעָל יֵשׁוּ רִשְׁיָעָא. קָמוּ כֻלְהוֹן⁹⁸
מְדִינָא <תָּא וְאַתְרוּאָתָא דִּהוּוּ יֵשׁ'
תַּמָּן וְגִזְרוּ תַעֲנִיתָא תִּלְתָּה יוֹמֵי וּבְעוּ
רַחֲמֵי מִן מַרְיָה דִּרְחֲמֵי.</p> |
|---|--|

⁹⁴ Lege: בהון.

⁹⁵ From here onwards, the ink of Ar1 changes from brown to black, and is also better preserved.

⁹⁶ Lege: דיתעני.

⁹⁷ Lit., 'with a whole heart'.

⁹⁸ Above the final *nun* there is a small square, perhaps signifying a correction to a final *mem*.

Jews) rose and decreed a fast of three days, and asked for mercy from the Master of Mercy.

JA1 great... and extreme distress.⁹⁹ ... <דָּהָה> עֲצִימָא וְגַהֵד אַלְבָּלָא.¹⁰⁰

When Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah saw this he wrote to all the towns, to Israel (i.e., to the Jews), that they should fast for three days and pr[ay] and ask God that He would annul Yeshu's act and his planning and his invocations.

פִּלְמָא נָצַר דְּלֶךְ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פֶּרַחְיָה פִּרְ[ח]י <ה> כָּתַב אֵלַי כּוֹל אֲלֻמְדֵּן אֵלַי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִצְוָמוּ תִּלְאָתַי אִיאָם וִיצְ[לוּ] וַיִּטְלְבוּ מִן אֱלֹהֵי יִפְסֹךְ פִּעַל יֵשׁוּ וַתְּדַבֵּירָה וְדַעוּאָתָ[ה].

The fact that this passage is omitted in all the Hebrew textual witnesses, and that the text of JA1 differs greatly from that of Ar1, probably reflects the absence of this passage from some of the Aramaic versions of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, and its appearance in longer and shorter forms in the Aramaic versions where it did appear. It is quite likely that it was added to an earlier form of the text, where it did not yet appear, in order to make the text encompass the entire Jewish world, rather than the small geographical area in which the narrative takes place (as was noted above, in our comments on 1.2). And in Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B, a fast (and Harkavy-B says ‘of three days’) does appear, but it is declared only after Yeshu asks King Caesar to destroy all the Jews in his kingdom (see section II.2.1 of our Introduction). However, we should also note the Greek loanword גִּימוֹס, that is νόμος,

⁹⁹ The text is obscure, and probably corrupt.

¹⁰⁰ Some words probably were omitted from the text, due to a parablepsis from the first reference to ‘nine months’ (in the previous passage) to the second reference to ‘nine months’, and the remaining text is corrupt.

‘law’, which is quite common in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, and much less common in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic.¹⁰¹

The text of Ar1 is partly modelled on the Book of Esther, as may be seen, for example, from a comparison with Est. 4.3, which describes the mourning and fasting of all the Jews in every province in which the king’s edict was promulgated, and with Est. 9.20, which describes the letters sent by Mordechai to all the Jews in all these provinces. Moreover, the declaration of a three-day fast in order to avert an imminent danger to the Jews is modelled on Est. 4.16, where she tells Mordechai to gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for three days and three nights, neither eating nor drinking, and adds that she and her female attendants will fast as well. Today, this fast is commemorated by a one-day fast (known as *ta’anit Esther*) on the thirteenth of Adar, i.e., one day before Purim, but in the Gaonic period a fast of three non-consecutive days at the end of Adar was still observed in some Jewish communities.¹⁰² Thus, the author behind this narrative element probably was thinking of the parallels between Yeshu and the biblical Haman, parallels to which we shall return below (in our comments on 7.8).¹⁰³ Unfortunately, our text does not state on which dates the fast took place, and this cannot be deduced from the other dates provided by the narrative. The investigation began on the twenty-eighth of Elul (see above, 1.3), and the pregnancy itself would last either nine or

¹⁰¹ See Sokoloff (2017, 382 and 388).

¹⁰² See *Massekhet Soferim* 17.3 and 21.1 (Higger 1937, 299 and 352).

¹⁰³ And see Kattan Gribetz (2011, 165–66).

twelve months (see below, 6.11), after which Yeshu would be executed on the fourteenth of Nisan (see below, 9.1), apparently of the following year, i.e., a year and a half after the beginning of the investigation. The fast could have taken place at any time during this interval, depending on how long each part of the narrative would take to unfold. However, I am aware of no evidence of a fast relating to Jesus, or of attempts to commemorate such a fast, in late-antique or medieval Jewish lists of fast-days.¹⁰⁴

6.10. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: God Turns the Foetus into a Stone

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	And the Holy One, blessed be He, did for them (i.e., for the Jews) as he had done in every period and every time, and the foetus that was in the belly of Caesar's daughter turned into a stone, ¹⁰⁵ and all the counsel of Yeshu the wicked was annulled, for thus it is written:	ועבד ק'ב'ה' דהיכי עבד בהון בכל עדן ובכל שעא ואתהפיד ההוא עוברא דהוה במעי ב{ת}>{ר}<{י}תיה ¹⁰⁶ דקיסר והוה אבנא וניבטל כל עצתיה דיישו רשיעא דהכין כתיב יה'יה' הי'פ'יר' ע'צ'ת' ג'ו'י'ם' וגו'.
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¹⁰⁴ For these lists, see Elizur (2007); Misgav (2015). And cf. Leiman (1983) for the possibility that the mysterious fast on the ninth of Tevet is somehow connected with events surrounding Jesus or Simon Kepha, with further discussion in Elizur (2007, 191–96). However, there is no evidence to support a connection between this fast and our text.

¹⁰⁵ Lit., ‘was overturned and became a stone’.

¹⁰⁶ Lege: ברתיה. Presumably, the scribe's addition of a *resh* was intended as a substitute for the first *tav*.

- “The Lord overturned the counsel of the nations, etc.”¹⁰⁷
- JA1 And God, the Exalted, the Majestic, did as is his custom to act kindly in every per[iod] with the sons of Israel, and he transformed the foetus and it turned to stone. פפעל אללה גל ועז כעאדאת אחסאנה פי כל זמן[אן] מע בני ישראל פאקבל¹⁰⁸ אלגניז וצאר חגר.
- Heb1 And then the Holy (One) worked miracles and placed a stone in her belly, and confounded the counsel and thought of Yeshu, and not at the end of nine months.¹⁰⁹ ואז עשה הק' נסים והשבין¹¹⁰ אבן במעיה ובבל עצתו ומחשבתו של ישו ולא בסוף ט' חדשים.
- Heb2 And before she reached (the time of) giving birth, the Lord made a great sign, and He commanded the angel who is in charge of the house of the child and of the womb, and he shaped the child and placed and dropped a stone [there?].¹¹¹ ומלפני אשר תגיע ללד עשה יי"י אות גדול ויצוה את המלך¹¹² הממונה על בית הילד¹¹³ ועל הרחם וצרת¹¹⁴ היל[ד] וישת ויפל ש[ם] אבן.

¹⁰⁷ Ps. 33.10.

¹⁰⁸ Lege: פאקלב.

¹⁰⁹ The text is garbled here; it seems likely that the word ילדה is missing after ולא; in such a case, the translation would be: ‘and she did not give birth at the end of nine months’.

¹¹⁰ Lege: והשבין.

¹¹¹ The Hebrew sentence is garbled, and the translation is tentative.

¹¹² Lege: המלאך.

¹¹³ This probably reflects the Aramaic בית ולד, as will be noted below.

¹¹⁴ Lege: וצר את.

- Heb3 The Master of the Universe צוה רבון העולמים למלאך אשר הוא
 commanded the angel who is in ממונה על בית הנולד ועל הרחם¹¹⁶
 charge of the house of the one ועשה את הילד לאבן בתוך בטנה
 who is born and of the womb, שלבת קיסר ויפול מן תחתה אבן
 and he turned the child into a והיתה אשה¹¹⁷ נפשה למות.
 stone in the belly of Caesar's
 daughter, and a stone fell down
 below her, and she was about
 to die.¹¹⁵
- Heb5 The Holy One, blessed be He, עשה הקב"ה נס ושלח לה אבן
 performed a miracle, and sent במעיה והפך¹¹⁸ לעצת ישו הרשע.
 her a stone into her womb, and
 overturned the counsel of
 Yeshu the wicked.

All the textual witnesses state that God—or His angel—turned the foetus in the belly of the pregnant virgin into a stone but do so in different ways.¹¹⁹ Ar1 and JA1 stress that this miracle was in line with God's benefactions towards the Jews at all times, but the other textual witnesses omit this detail. Ar1, Heb1, and Heb5 stress that in so doing God confounded Yeshu's counsel, but the other textual witnesses omit this statement. Ar1 also adds a citation of Ps. 33.10 as a proof-text, but this citation is found in none of the other textual witnesses, and seems rather unusual given

¹¹⁵ The translation of the last five words is uncertain.

¹¹⁶ JTS 8998 ends here, and T-S K 17.1 begins.

¹¹⁷ Lege: נוטה?

¹¹⁸ Or: והפך, with the same meaning.

¹¹⁹ For an attempt to analyse the story of the stone foetus from a history-of-medicine perspective, see Meerson (2013); for an analysis of the same story from a feminist perspective, see Kattan Gribetz (2020, 100–11).

the paucity of biblical citations throughout the rest of the text. It therefore seems quite possible that this citation was added to the Aramaic text at a late stage, and that the Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew texts were translated from an Aramaic version that did not yet have this addition. But the basic claim, that the foetus in the maiden's belly was a stone, was also known to Agobard of Lyons, as we noted in our comments on 6.6.

JA1 uses the common Muslim epithets of Allah, 'the Exalted, the Majestic' (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ), which often is translated by the single epithet, 'the Almighty'), and will use it once again later in the narrative (see below, 7.6).¹²⁰ This usage is common in Judaeo-Arabic texts, but in JA1 it joins a series of other terms and concepts that betray the Muslim context in which this version was translated and transmitted, as noted in our description of this textual witness in the section II.1.6 of our Introduction.

Ar1 uses the verb בטל, 'to annul', to describe how Yeshu's counsel (עיצה) was overturned, but Heb1 uses the verb בלבל, and speaks of Yeshu's counsel as well as his thought (מחשבה). This may reflect an Aramaic version that used the expression בלבל עצתיה ומחשבתיה, an expression that finds close parallels in the Aramaic incantation bowls and elsewhere.¹²¹

As often is the case, Heb2/Heb3 offer an expansion to the text of the other textual witnesses. In this case, they claim that rather than performing the miracle by Himself, God sent the angel who is in charge of the womb to turn the foetus into a stone.

¹²⁰ In both cases, the order is גל ועז, rather than the more common עז וגל.

¹²¹ See Ford and Morgenstern (2020, 48–50). I am grateful to Ohad Abudraham for this reference.

The assumption that each element of nature, and each part of the human body, have an angel who is in charge of, or appointed over (*memuneh 'al*) it was extremely common among Jews in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹²² The text of Heb2/Heb3 probably reflects a theological preference for a more distant God, who leaves the technicalities of the daily running of the universe to his numerous angelic underlings. This element may have been added to the Hebrew text long after it was translated from Aramaic, but the expression בית הילד, or בית הנולד, seems like a misguided translation from Aramaic בית ולד, ‘womb’, which is followed by the correct translation, הרחם.¹²³

Whereas Heb2 probably says that the angel ‘dropped’, or placed, a stone in the maiden’s belly, Heb3 misunderstood this to mean that the stone dropped out of her belly (and cf. the following passage). Heb3 also adds that the maiden was about to die because of this. This may parallel the claim found in JA1 in the next passage, that ‘the maiden did not give birth and her pains increased’, but probably is due to a misunderstanding of the text by one of its copyists.

¹²² For detailed surveys of ancient Jewish angelology, see Ahuvia (2021), and cf. Bohak (2022).

¹²³ And cf. below, 6.12. For בית ולד, ‘the house of a foetus’, i.e., ‘womb’, see Sokoloff (2020, 150), and cf. בני בני, ‘the house of children’, i.e., ‘the womb’, in Yardeni and Bohak (2016, 105). In Hebrew, the word בית, ‘house’, also refers to the womb (see, for example, m Miqv 8.4), but I am unaware of the appearance of בית הילד or בית הנולד in other Hebrew texts.

As noted in our comments on 6.6, the claim that the foetus in the maiden's womb turned out to be a stone was known to Agobard as well, although in his account it is Jesus himself who 'placed a stone foetus inside her (*lapidis conceptum intulerit*)'. But here too, Agobard's version probably reflects his memory of what his Jewish interlocutors had told him, rather than a different version of our text.

6.11. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Yeshu Explains Why Caesar's Daughter Does Not Give Birth, and Wants to Cut Her Belly Open

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Harkavy-A, Harkavy-B, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	And because the Holy One, blessed be He, had turned that foetus into a stone, nine months passed and she did not give birth. Caesar sent and they brought Yeshu the wicked. He (Tiberinus) said to him: "Why did she not give birth?" He (Yeshu) said to him: "There are among the Jews those who bind the baby in its mother's belly for twelve months." After twelve months he (Tiberinus) sent after him and brought Yeshu. He said to him: "Twelve	וכיון דהפיך ק'ב'ה לההוא עוברא אבנא עברו תשעה ירחי ולא ילדת. שדר קיסר ואתיוה ליישו רשיעא. אמ' ליה אמאי לא קא ילדת. אמ' ליה אית בעמא דיהודאי דאחדין לולדא במעי אימיה תריסר ירחי. לבתר תריסר ירחי שדר בתריה ואתייה ליישו. אמ' ליה עברו תריסר ירחי ואמאי לא קא ילדה. אמ' ליה דילמא עיסקי במילי עלמא דבתולתא היא ולא נפיק ולדא עד דתיבעיל. ואי יהבת לי רשותא אנא קרענא ליה לכרסה ומפיקנא ליה ממעי אימיה כד חי וידכר ¹²⁴ וידע מרי קיסר דאנחנא בני אלהא דשמיא ואית בן יוכלא למעבד כל מילי
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¹²⁴ Lege: ודכר?

months have passed, and why did she not give birth?" He (Yeshu) said to him: "Perhaps we are dealing with "the matters of the world,"¹²⁵ for she is a virgin, and the baby will not come out until she is penetrated. If you grant me permission, I will cut open her belly, and will extract it from its mother's womb alive, and my master, Caesar, will remember and know that¹²⁶ we are the sons of the God of Heaven, and we have the ability to do everything we want." Caesar said to him: "Go and do so."

דבעינא. אמ' ליה קיסר קום עיבד הכי.

H-A The days of her giving birth have passed, and she did not give birth. King Caesar said to Yeshu, "Yeshu, in how many months does a woman give birth? Lo, the days of her giving birth have passed, and she did not give birth." Yeshu said to King Caesar, "Grant me

ועברו יומי ילדותה ולא ילדת אמר מלכא קיסר לישו ישו בכמה ירחין תלד איתתא הא עברו יומי ילדותה ולא ילדת אמר ישו למלכא קיסר הב לי רשותא ואפתח כריסה דעלמא לי ואפיק יתיה והא דכורא.

¹²⁵ For this expression, see Schäfer (1981, §340), where מילי עלמא, 'mundane matters', are contrasted with דברי תורה, 'words of the Torah'. But here the expression might also carry a sexual connotation, or be a pun on the Hebrew word עלמה, 'a maiden', as in Isa. 7.14, a verse that was applied to Mary from the Gospels onwards.

¹²⁶ Or: 'alive, and a male, and my master, Caesar, will know that'.

permission, and I will open up the maiden's belly and will extract it (i.e., the baby), and lo, (it will be) a male."

H-B The days of her giving birth have passed, and she did not give birth. King Caesar said to Yeshu, "Yeshu, in how many months does a woman give birth?" Yeshu said to King Caesar, "The Jews do not let them (sic) give birth. Grant me permission, and I will open up the maiden's belly and will extract it, and lo, a male." And King Caesar gave his daughter to Yeshu.

ועברת יומי ילדותה ולא ילידת. אמר מלכא קיסר ליישו. יישו בכמה ירחין תליד איתתא אמר יישו למלכא קיסר. יהודאי לא שבקין יתהון למילד. הב לי רשותא ואפתח כריסא דעלימתא ואפיק יתיה והוא דוכרא. ויהב מלכא קיסר ית בריתה¹²⁷ ליישו.

JA1 When nine months had passed, the maiden did not give birth and her pains increased. And Yeshu was brought, and the king said to him: "Why didn't the maiden give birth as you had claimed?" And Yeshu said: "Oh king, the Jews delayed¹²⁸

פלמא כמל[ת] ט' שהור לם תלד אלגאריה וזאד גהדהא. פאחדר¹²⁹ יש[ו] פקאל לה אלמלך לם לא תלד אלגאריה בזיעמד. פקאל יש[ו] יא איהו¹³⁰ אלמלך אליהוד קד אכרו¹³¹ ולאדתהא. ורבטוה אלי יב שהר. ובעד דלך לם תלד. אחצר ישו פקאל אנ אליהוד סחרוהא לאבן איוה

¹²⁷ Lege: ברתייה.

¹²⁸ Or: 'captured'/'bound'/'withheld'.

¹²⁹ Lege: פאחצר (i.e., فأحضر), and note the spelling אחצר later on in this passage. It seems as if the scribe detected the error, and tried to 'stretch' the *dalet* into a *tzadi*. For this scribe's confusion between *ד*, *צ*, and *ס*, see also below, 8.4.

¹³⁰ Lege: איוה (i.e., أَيُّهَا), and cf. the correct spelling below.

¹³¹ Or: אכדו.

her birth.” And they tied him until (the end of) twelve months, and after this she (still) did not give birth. Yeshu was brought and said: “The Jews practised magic upon her, but, Oh king, allow me to cut open her belly—you shall see a male baby and know that we are friends of God.”

אלמלך אטלק לי נשק בטנהא סתרא
ולד דבר ותעלם אננא אוליא אללה.

Heb1 When the time for giving birth had passed, Caesar sent, and they brought Yeshu the wicked. He said to him: “Why did she not give birth? The time has already passed.” Yeshu answered and said to him: “There are women in Israel (i.e., among the Jews), and they delay to give birth¹³² in their bellies, and do not give birth. Now, if you grant me permission, I will cut up her belly and will extract the baby—and it will even be male—and our master Caesar will know that we are the sons

וכשעבר זמן הלידה שלח קיסר
והביאו ליישו הרשע. א"ל למה לא
ילדה כבר עבר הזמן. ענה ישו ואמ'
לו יש נשים ביש' ומאחרות לילד
במעיהן ואינן יולדות. עתה אם תתן
לי רשות אני אקרע מעיה ואוציא
הילד ויהיה גם זכר וידע אדוננו קיסר
כי אנחנו בני אלהי השמים ואר' ויש
ביהודים ועושין כמו כן. אז גזר לו
קיסר שיקרעה.

¹³² The meaningless construction is due to a mistranslation of the Aramaic *לולדא*; the verb was misread as *דאחרין*, ‘who are late’, and *לולדא* was translated as *לילד*, ‘to the child’. However, a later copyist, understood *לילד* as an infinitive, ‘to give birth’ (as in the many magical recipes titled *למקשה לילד*, ‘for (a woman) who has trouble giving birth’), and added the word ‘women’ as the subject.

of the God of Heaven and earth, and there are among the Jews and they do likewise.”¹³³ Then Caesar decreed upon him to tear her up.

Heb2 And when the Lord confounded their counsel, the people of the kingdom answered Yeshu‘a the wicked and said to him: “The woman who became pregnant—why did she not give birth?” He answered and said to them: “There are among the people of the Jews men who do not let the child leave his mother’s belly... alive,¹³⁴ so that you will know, our master the king, that we are both the sons of the God of Heaven.”

Heb3 Caesar answered and said to them: “But wasn’t she pregnant with a male (baby)—so why did a stone come out of her?”

ויהי כי בלל יי"י את ע[.]{<צ>תם השיבו אנשׁי המלכות ל[י]שוע הרשע ואמרו לו האשה אשר הרתה למה לו¹³⁵ ילדה. ענה ואמר להם יש בעם היהודים אנשים אשר לא {ל} יעזבו את הילד לצאת מן מעי אמו¹³⁶ אשר הוא חי למען תדע את אדונינו המלך כי אנחנו שנינו בני אלהי השמים.

ענה קיסר ואמר להם הלא זכר היתה הרה ולמה יצא ממה¹³⁷ אבן ענה ישוע ויוחנן יש ביהודים אנשים כי עשו את הילד במעי אמו לאבן.

¹³³ The last part of the sentence is obscure, and probably corrupt; it may belong in the previous sentence, which dealt with the Jews who can prevent women from giving birth, but cf. the parallel in Heb5.

¹³⁴ Lit., ‘that he is alive’, probably a faulty translation of כד חי. At this point, the text should have presented Yeshu’s request to cut open the belly of Caesar’s daughter.

¹³⁵ Lege: לא.

¹³⁶ It seems as if many words were omitted from the text at this point.

¹³⁷ Lege: ממנה.

Yeshu'a and Yoḥanan
answered: "There are among
the Jews men who made the
child into a stone in its
mother's belly."

Heb5 Caesar said to Yeshu the
wicked: "Why does the
daughter not give birth?"
Yeshu said: "There are among
the people Israel (i.e., the Jews)
(those) who delay her, so that
she will not give birth, and
there are among them (those)
who hinder the child, so it will
not come out of its mother's
belly. And you, my master
Caesar, grant us permission and
we will cut open the belly of
the daughter and we will
extract the child from its
mother's womb and you will
know that we are the sons of
God, and there are among the
Jews (those) who make fun of
you, and delay her so that she
will not give birth." Caesar said
to him: "Go, do as you have
said."

אמ' קיסר לישו הרשע למה הבת
אינה יולדת. אמ' ישו יש בעם ישראל
דמאחרין לה ולא תלד ויש מהם מי
מעכב את הילד שלא יצא ממעי אמו.
ואתה אדוני קיסר תן לנו רשות ונקרע
כריסה שלבת ונוציא הילד ממעי אמו
ותדע כי אנחנו בני אלהים ויש
ביהודים דמשחקין בד' ומאחרין לה
ולא תלד. אמ' לו קיסר קום עשה
כאשר אמרת.

In this passage, there are many differences between the textual witnesses, which also make it more difficult to parse it into smaller units. All the textual witnesses—except for Heb3, which assumes that the maiden had already given birth to a stone—have Yeshu explaining to Tiberinus why the maiden did not give

birth on time, but here we can see how some of the text's Hebrew translators failed to understand the text in front of them. Ar1 has Yeshu explaining that some Jews have the ability to seize a baby in its mother's belly, thus preventing it from coming out and prolonging the pregnancy for up to twelve months. Such beliefs are well known from the story of Yoḥni bat Reṭivi, the witch who used to prolong women's pregnancies and would then offer to pray for them to be delivered; when they would agree to seek her help, she would destroy her implements of witchcraft, and the women would indeed give birth.¹³⁸ Harkavy-B says that the Jews prevent the daughter from giving birth—presumably, by the miraculous powers of their three-day fast that Harkavy-B had mentioned earlier.

JA1 may have read the verb as אָחַר, and claimed that the Jews delayed the maiden's delivery, although it is possible that JA1's text reads אָכַד, rather than אָכַר, and thus reflects an accurate translation of the text attested in Ar1. That JA1's translator understood the intended sense of Yeshu's claim is made clear by Yeshu's later assertion that the Jews 'practised magic upon her', or 'bewitched her' (סַחְרוּהָ), thus delaying her delivery. But the Hebrew versions go in different directions. Heb2 paraphrases the claim that some Jews have seized the baby in its mother's belly

¹³⁸ This story is merely alluded to in bt Sota 22a, and the full details are given by Nissim Gaon and by Rashi; see Malhi (2009, 161–62). For a witch who made one woman's pregnancy last for more than eight years see Apuleius, *Met.* 1.9, and for Cyprian's confession that he 'used to bind foetuses in the womb so that they could not come out' (אֲשֶׁר מְבַרְכִּים לְבָרָא בְּטֶחַל וְלֹא יֵצֵאוּ), see Cherkashina and Kuzin (2022, 177).

(perhaps on the basis of a claim similar to that made in Harkavy-B, with *לֹא יַעֲזֹבוּ* rendered as *לֹא שִׁבְקִין*), whereas the Hebrew translators behind Heb1 and Heb5 misread the verb *אָחַד*, ‘to seize’, as *אָחַר*, ‘to be late’, and thus had to rephrase the whole sentence. Heb5 states that some Jews delay (מֵאַחֲרִין) the mother so that she does not give birth, and some Jews hinder the foetus so that it will not come out of its mother’s belly. But in Heb1 it is some Jewish mothers who are late (מֵאַחֲרֹת) in giving birth.

Ar1 and JA1 state that when nine months have passed and the maiden did not give birth, it was decided to wait three more months, but Harkavy-A, Harkavy-B, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5 omit this part. This has some wider implications for the chronology of the entire narrative, but unfortunately the chronology makes little sense either way, since the proceedings began on the twenty-eighth of Elul (see above, 1.3) and Yeshu was crucified on the fourteenth of Nisan (see below, 9.1), i.e., eighteen-and-a-half months later, but it is not clear when within this time frame we should place the beginning of the king’s daughter’s pregnancy.

Ar1 also adds Yeshu’s claim that the delay in the maiden’s delivery might be due to her being a virgin, and that she will not give birth until she is sexually penetrated. On the physical level, this might be construed as a claim that a virgin whose private parts have never been ‘opened’ simply cannot give birth. On the polemical level, this might be an oblique critique of the Christian claims about the virgin birth, an issue that was deemed problematic in ancient Christian discourse, as may be seen, for example, from the story in the *Protevangelium of James* of how a woman

named Salome inserted her finger into Mary's private parts in order to verify that she was still a virgin even after she had given birth to Jesus.¹³⁹ Interestingly, none of the other textual witnesses present Yeshu's claim, perhaps because it was deemed too irreverent, or too immodest, by some of the text's translators and copyists.

Ar1, Harkavy-A, Harkavy-B, JA1, Heb1, and Heb5 have Yeshu ask Tiberinus for permission to cut open the pregnant maiden's belly; in Heb2 this part probably was omitted from the text, and in Heb3 it did not appear, since Heb3 already had the maiden give birth to a stone. In Ar1, Heb1, Heb2, and Heb5, Yeshu repeats the claim that he and Yoḥanan are 'sons of God', and in JA1 this is again modified to 'friends of God', as already happened earlier in the narrative (see above, 6.5). In Ar1, Yeshu also boasts that 'we have the ability to do everything we want', a boast that is not found in any of the other textual witnesses, but echoes the boasts made by Yeshu and Yoḥanan in 6.5. At that point in the text, Heb1 and Heb5 share a claim made by Yeshu that there are some Jews who prevented the maiden from giving birth; this claim repeats what has already been said before, and in Heb1 it seems to have been corrupted in the process of textual transmission. Interestingly, Heb5 uses the verb מִשְׁחָק, which already appeared in Heb1 and Heb5 at 6.6, but is never used by the other Hebrew textual witnesses.

¹³⁹ *Prot. Jac.* 20.

Ar1, Harkavy-B, Heb1, and Heb5 have Tiberinus granting Yeshu permission to cut open the maiden's belly, but this is omitted in Harkavy-A, JA1, and Heb2. And as in the previous passage, Heb2 and Heb3 diverge, with Heb2 paralleling the other textual witnesses and Heb3 assuming that the stone already came out of the maiden's belly, so Caesar asks why this is so and Yeshu explains this to him, without any need to cut up her belly.

6.12. Yeshu, Yoḥanan, and Tiberinus Caesar: Yeshu Opens Caesar's Daughter's Belly, She Dies, and He Cannot Bring Her Back to Life

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Harkavy-B, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	And Yeshu the wicked rose and tore up the belly of Caesar's daughter, and that foetus was discovered to be a stone in the womb of that virgin. At that moment ¹⁴⁰ Caesar said to him: "Bring her back to life." He tried (to), but could not.	וקם יישו רשיעא ובזעה לכרסה דברתיה דקיסר ואשתכח ההוא וְלִ[ד] אֲבָנָא בַּמַּעֲהָ [ד] הָהִיא בתולתא. בההיא שעתא ¹⁴¹ אמר {לק>י<} לִ[י] הֵ קיסר אחיה בעא ולא יכל.
H-B	And he (i.e., Yeshu) opened the belly of the maiden. And the Holy One, Blessed be He had mercy upon Israel (i.e., the Jews) and turned it into a rock.	ופתח כריסא דעלימתא. וחס קודשא בריך הוא על ישראל ושוי יתיה גללא.

¹⁴⁰ Add: 'she died'.

¹⁴¹ The word מתה, or מיתת, must have been omitted from the text here, as may be deduced both from the context (Caesar wants Yeshu to revive her, and later says that Yeshu and Yoḥanan killed the king's daughter), and from all the other textual witnesses.

- JA1 The king brought his daughter and cut open her belly, and behold, there was a stone in her abdomen. She died immediately, and the king said to them: “Bring her back to life as you have claimed.” They tried to do so but could not.
- Heb1 Yeshu the wicked rose and tore her womb, and a stone was found in her womb. And the virgin died at that hour.
- Heb2 And they took iron tools, and tore up her belly, and extracted from “the house of the child,”¹⁴⁴ from the womb, a stone. And that virgin died.
- Heb3 ...And that virgin died.
- פאחצר אלמלך בנתה ושק בטנהא ואדא פי גופהא חגר. תם מאתת ללוקת. פקאל להם אלמלך אחיוהא כמא אזעמתם¹⁴² פאלתמסו דלך פלם יצלו.
- קם יישו הרשע וקרע מעיה ונמ={צא אבן במיעיה. ותמת הבתולה בה שעה.¹⁴³
- ויקחו כלי ברזל¹⁴⁵{א} ויקרעו את בטנה ויוציאו מן {בִּטְנָה} בת¹⁴⁶{מן} הילד מן הרחם אבן. ותמת אותה הבתולה.
- ותמת אתה הבתולה.

¹⁴² I.e., זעמתם; shifts between I and IV verbal forms are very common in Judaeo-Arabic; see Blau (1980, 75–77).

¹⁴³ The last two Hebrew words are unusual, and the result of a faulty translation of the Aramaic שעתא, also attested in Ar1.

¹⁴⁴ For this expression, cf. above, 6.10.

¹⁴⁵ The extra *aleph*—deleted by the scribe—might be a reflection of the Aramaic text behind this Hebrew version.

¹⁴⁶ The scribe seems to have wavered between בטנה, ‘her belly’ and בית (הילד), ‘the womb’ (as in 6.10), or בת, ‘the (king’s) daughter’, and apparently chose בת.

Heb5 And Yeshu the wicked rose and וקם ישו הרש' ובזע¹⁴⁷ למעה דבת
 tore up the womb of the king's מלכא ויצא ממעיה אבן. ומתה
 daughter, and a stone came out באותה שעה.
 of her womb. And she died at
 that hour.

Ar1, Harkavy-B, Heb1, Heb2, and Heb5 all agree that Yeshu cut open the maiden's belly, but JA1 seems to claim that Tiberinus himself did this. However, they all agree that what was found in her belly was a stone, and all the textual witnesses except for Harkavy-B state that she immediately died (in Ar1, the verb 'died' was omitted from the text). But Heb3, which had earlier told us that the maiden gave birth to a stone, and that Yeshu explained why this has happened, skips the account of cutting open her belly, and merely says that she subsequently died. In Heb5, we find the slightly Hebraised Aramaic expression *ובזע למעה דבת מלכא*, which probably reflects the Aramaic text from which this Hebrew version was translated.

The story of how Yeshu killed Tiberinus' daughter recalls a story found in the *Acta Archelai* and recounted by Epiphanius in his detailed biography of Mani. Having explained how Mani acquired his dualistic theories and his books of magic (see our comments on 3.6, above), Hegemonius and Epiphanius claim that Mani heard that the son of the Persian king was ill, and decided that he could heal him with the help of his books. Unfortunately for him, his treatments were of no avail, the young man died, and

¹⁴⁷ Heb6 has: *ובקע*, which is either a copyist's error or an attempt to render the Aramaic *בזע* in Hebrew, as in 2 Kgs 15.16: *את כל ההרותיה בקע*: 'he tore up all its pregnant women'.

the Persian king threw Mani into prison, intending to have him tortured and executed. Mani then bribed the prison-guard and managed to escape, but he was eventually caught and murdered, with his body—flayed and stuffed-up with straw—displayed for all to see.¹⁴⁸ The parallel between this story and ours may be pure coincidence, but may also reflect the use of a common topos of ancient polemics, showing how the founders of deviant religious movements fell afoul of the local rulers by claiming to help their children and then killing them instead. This would be the exact opposite of what happened when ‘good’ religious leaders tried to heal the rulers’ children, as in the famous story of how Rabbi Shime‘on bar Yoḥai healed the daughter of the Roman Emperor.¹⁴⁹

Ar1 and JA1 add a nice touch to this scene, by having Tiberinus ask Yeshu to revive the maiden (Ar1), or remind Yeshu and Yoḥanan of their earlier boasts, including their ability to revive the dead (see above, 6.5), and telling them to do so now. But in both texts, Yeshu (and Yoḥanan) try to do this and fail. The fact that this element is not found in any of the Hebrew versions might show that it was not there in some of the Aramaic versions of this text, probably because—as we have noted

¹⁴⁸ See Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai* 64–66 (Beeson 1906, 93), and see the English translation by Vermes (2001, 145 and 148); Epiphanius, *Panar.* 66.4–5 (Holl 1915–1933, III:22–24), and see the English translation by Williams (2013, 231–32). For the many different versions of the story of Mani’s failed healing of the king’s son, or sister, or relative, see Gardner (2020, 71–77).

¹⁴⁹ For this story, see *bt Me‘ilah* 17b, with Bar-Ilan (1995, 21–24).

above—the assumption in the rest of our text is that Yeshu and Yoḥanan really can perform miracles, but do so by way of magic (see our comments on 2.1). But in Ar1, and especially in JA1, this short exchange serves to prove that when Yeshu and Yoḥanan boasted that they can revive the dead it was a blatant lie. Moreover, as both the canonical Gospels and the apocryphal stories about Jesus insist that he could revive the dead, and as many Jews assumed that when the Messiah would come he would revive the dead, the insistence that Yeshu could not revive the maiden whom he had just killed provides an additional polemical axe which our narrative happily grinds.¹⁵⁰ If he could not revive the dead, he certainly was not the Messiah, nor was he the son of God.

6.13. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar:

Tiberinus, Yehoshu‘a and Marinus Discuss What Should Be Done with Yeshu and Yoḥanan

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Harkavy-B, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	Caesar [answer]ed and said to Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and to Marinus the great elder: “These	[מתי]ב קיסר ואמ' ליה ליהושע בן פרחיה ולמרינוס סבא רבה אינשי אילין [דא]טעו לבריאות[א] וק[ט]לו
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¹⁵⁰ For stories about Jesus reviving the dead see, for example, the raising of Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5.41–42, Matt. 9.25 and Luke 8.54–55, the raising of Lazarus in John 11.43–44, and the many stories of the boy Jesus bringing the dead back to life in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. For Jewish eschatological scenarios in which the Messiah revives the dead see Reeves (2006, 63, 111, 119, 121, 128, 137), and cf. Dvir (2020, 168 and 201).

- men [who mis]led the people and killed the king's daughter—what is the judgment of these [men]? You must...¹⁵¹ [execu]tion.” They said: “King Caesar! At this time¹⁵² we cannot (execute people), but only [the Holy One, blessed] be He, and you can.”
- H-B King Caesar said to the Jews, “Take Yeshu and do to him whatever you see fit.”
- JA1 The king sent after Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and after Marinus the great elder, and the king said to them: “These people who misled the people and killed the king's daughter—pass judgment upon them.” They said: “The matter (belongs) to God and to our master the king.”
- Heb1 When Caesar saw this he answered and said to R. Yehoshu‘a and to Marinus: “It is clear that the God of Heaven loves you, and revealed all this
- בתריה¹⁵³ דמלכא מאי דיניהון דאילין אַ[ינשי] חיבין [א]ת[ו]ן ל[] ... קט[לא] אַמְרִין קִסר מלכא לית בידן יומא דין אלא בידיא [דק'ב]ה' ובידך.
- ואמר למלכא¹⁵⁴ קיסר ליהודאי סבו ית יישו ועבדו ביה כד תקין בעיניכון.
- פבעת אלמלך ורא יהושוע בן פרחיה וורא מרינוס אלשיך אלכביר פקאל להם אלמלך האולי אלקום אלדי קד אצלו אלנאס וקתלו בנת אלמלך אנפדו פיהם אלחכם. פקאלו אלאמר אלי אללה ואלי סידנא אלמלך.
- כשראה קיסר בזאת ענה ואמ' לר' יהוש' ולמרינוס נתברר שאוהב אתכם אלהי השמים וגילה לכם כל זה ומבלבל ומבטל לחישת הכשפנים ואוחזי עין ומעוננים וקוסמים יהולל¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Or: ‘of these guilty [men]?’.

¹⁵² Lit., ‘on this day’.

¹⁵³ Lege: ברתיה.

¹⁵⁴ Lege: מלכא.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Isa. 44.25: מִפֶּר אֶתֹת בְּדִים וְקִסְמִים יְהוֹלֵל, ‘He who foils the signs of the seers and confuses the diviners’.

to you, and He confounds and annuls the spell of the magicians and of the tricksters¹⁵⁶ and He confuses the diviners and the wizards, whose deeds provoke Him every day.” Then R. Yehoshu‘a and Marinus answered and said to the king: “Our master! Men who misled the world and led it to destruction and made it liable to death (?) and killed this girl—what judgment does the king pass upon them, and to what are they liable?”

Heb2 King Tiberinus answered and said to the Jews: “Blessed are you, for your God revealed the mysteries to you, and confounded the counsel of these magicians who irritate Him every day.” Our teachers¹⁵⁹ answered and said to King Tiberinus: “What is due by law that we will judge them?”

אשר משיהן¹⁵⁷ מכעיסין לו בכל יום.
אז ענה ר' יהוש' ומרינוס ואמרו למלך
אדונינו אנשים שהתעו העולם
ואבדוהו וחייבוהו חיוב מיתה והמיתו.
זאת העֶעֶרָה¹⁵⁸ מה ד>י<ן גוזר המלך
עליהם ומה הם חייבים.

ויען טברינוס המלך ויאמר ליהודים
אשריכם כי אלהיכם גלה לכם את
הרזים. ויבלבל את עצת אלה
המכשפים {ה} המרגזים לפניו בכל
יום. השיבו וענו רבותינו אותו ואמרו
לטברינוס המלך מה חייב מן הדין
אשר נשפוט {להם} אותם.

¹⁵⁶ Lit., ‘those who seize the eye’. For this typically rabbinic term, see below.

¹⁵⁷ Lege: מעשיהן.

¹⁵⁸ Lege: הנערה. The scribe wrote an ‘ayin instead of a nun, but perhaps tried to erase parts thereof so as to create a nun.

¹⁵⁹ Or: ‘Our rabbis’.

- Heb3 King Tiberinus answered and said to the Jews: “Happy are you, that (God) revealed the secret of the mysteries to you, and confounded the counsel of these magicians who irritate Him every day.” Our teachers answered and said to King Tiberinus: “What is due by the law that we will judge them already?”
- Heb5 Caesar answered and said to R. Yehoshu‘a and to all the Sages of Israel: “It is good for you that the God of Heaven had mercy upon you, and revealed to you all these things that are things of magic that irritate Him.” R. Yehoshu‘a and Marinus the elder answered and said to the king: “These people erred and misled the world and killed a king’s daughter; what is their (due) judgment?”
- ויען טברינוס המלך ויאמר ליהודים
אשריכם כי גלה לכם סוד הרזים
ויבלבל עצת אלה המכשפים
המרגיזים לפניו בכל יום השיבו וענו
רבותינו אתו ואמרו לטברינוס המלך
מה חוב מן הדין אשר נעשה בם כבר.
- השיב קיסר ואמ' לר' יהושע ולכל
חכמי יש' טוב לכם דריחם אלהי
השמים וגלי עליכם כל אלו הדברים
שהן דברי כשפים שמרגיזין לפניו.
השיב ר' יהושע ומרינוס סבא ואמרו
למלך אלו האנשים תעו והתעו את
העולם והרגו בתו של מלך מה דינם.

Ar1 and Heb1 have Tiberinus address Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus the elder, but JA1—sensing that they probably were not there when the whole scene with the maiden gradually unfolded—has him summon them first. Heb5 has Tiberinus addressing R. Yehoshu‘a and all the Sages of Israel (which Heb5 also mentions in 6.3 and 8.10), and Harkavy-B, Heb2 and Heb3 have

him address ‘the Jews’ as a collective. But the contents of his address, and of the Jews’ response, diverge further. In Ar1 and JA1, he lists the crimes of Yeshu and Yoḥanan, and asks Yehoshu‘a and Marinus to punish them. In both texts, they respond that this issue should be decided either by God or by Caesar, and in Ar1 they also explain that they themselves have no power—presumably, no authority to execute criminals. But in all the Hebrew versions, Tiberinus blesses the Jewish leaders for the way by which God had protected them from the evil magicians, and it is the Jews themselves who ask what punishment Yeshu and Yoḥanan deserve, with Heb1 and Heb5 listing their various crimes. Of the two types of text, the one found in the Hebrew versions might seem less plausible, since it has Tiberinus speaking almost like a pious Jew, and in Heb1 he even echoes a famous biblical verse about God confounding the diviners. Moreover, the description in Heb1 includes phrases such as כשפנים ואוחזי עין that re-appear elsewhere in Heb1 (see 0.8, 0.13 and 2.2) and are unattested in the other textual witnesses.¹⁶⁰ However, given the appearance of this version in all the Hebrew textual witnesses, it is likely to have appeared in some of the Aramaic texts as well.¹⁶¹ This is especially true of Heb1’s expression, מה ד>י<ן גוזר המלך, עליהם, which seems to reflect the גזר דינא of the text’s original title,

¹⁶⁰ The word כשפנות is also used by Heb5, in 6.2 and 6.7, but אחיזת עיניים is unique to Heb1. For this typically rabbinic term, see Alexander (2005).

¹⁶¹ Note also that some of the Hebrew phrases might be due to translation from Aramaic. For example, מרגיזין לפניו might be a poor translation of מרגיזין קדמי, and cf. Targum Onqelos to Num. 14.11, where עד אָנה עד אימתי יהוה מרגיזין קדמי עמא הדין is rendered as ינאצני העם הזה.

as noted in our comments on 1.1. Finally, Harkavy-B has the king give a shorter answer, which also conveys the contents of the next section, by telling the Jews to do to Yeshu whatever they see fit.

Ar1's explicit claim that the Jews have no power to judge people—presumably, to inflict capital punishment—sound like an echo of John 18.31, when Pilate tells the Jews to try Jesus according to their own law (i.e., the Torah), and they respond that 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death' (ἡμῖν οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἀποκτείνειν οὐδένα). This scene is re-enacted in the *Acta Pilati*, where the Jews repeat the very same words.¹⁶² In our text Tiberinus insists that the Jews should be the ones to try Yeshu, as we shall read in the following passage, but it seems that Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid knew of a somewhat different version, since he says that the Jews 'say that Emperor Tiberius ordered him to be killed at the request of the Jews, and because his daughter died after the conception that Jesus brought about without the help of a man'.¹⁶³ This is a brief summary of the entire scene with Tiberinus' daughter, but here it is the king himself who orders that Jesus should be killed.

¹⁶² *Acta Pilati*, Tischendorf (1853, 218).

¹⁶³ See above, section II.2.8 of the Introduction.

6.14. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar: Tiberinus Tells Yehoshu‘a and Marinus to Judge Yeshu and Yoḥanan According to the Torah

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| Ar1 | He said [to them]: “These m[en] are Jews, and they are from your people, and they [deal] with magic, judge them (according to) the judgment of Torah, and if not—we will uproot you from the world.” | אמ' [להון] גוֹבְרִיאַ אֵילִין יְהוּדַי אֵינֻן
וּמִן עֵמָא דִּילְכוֹן אֵינֻן וְקֵא [עֵסְקִי?]
בְּחֵרְשִׁיא דִּינֹ בְּהוּ [ן ד] יֵנֵא דְאוּרִיתֵא
וְאֵילֵא נַעֲקֵר יִתְכוֹן מִן עֵלְמָא. |
| JA1 | He said to them: “These people are Jews and they are from among you. Judge them as it is laid out for you in the Torah.” | פְּקֵאל לֵהֶם אֵן הוּלִי אֱלֻקוֹם יְהוּדִי וְהוּם
מִנְכֶם. אַחֲכֵמוּ עֲלֵיהֶם כְּמֵא גֵאֲכֶם פִּי
אֶלְתוּרָה. |
| Heb1 | Caesar answered them: “These (people) are Jews and they were dealing with magic, which your Torah forbade. Judge them according to the judgment of your Torah.” They answered: “The king...” | עֲנֵה קִיסַר לֵהֶם אֵלֹי יְהוּדִים הֵם
וְעֵסְקוּ בְּקִסְמֻנוֹת ¹⁶⁴ שְׂאִסְרָה תוֹרַתְכֶם.
דִּינוּ לֵהֶם כְּדִין תוֹרַתְכֶם. עֲנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ. ¹⁶⁵ |

¹⁶⁴ The word קִסְמֻנוֹת, rather than קִסְמִים, is extremely rare in Hebrew, and—as may be deduced from the Maagarim website (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/>)—is only attested in Karaite texts. This may reflect the origins of Israel son of Yequiel, the scribe who copied Heb1.

¹⁶⁵ Some words must have been omitted here.

- Heb2 He answered and said to them: ויענ[ה] ויאמר להם עשו להם כאשר
 “Do to them as you wish, so תחפוצו שלא יאבדו אתכם מן העולם.
 that they will not destroy you
 from the world.”
- Heb3 He answered and said: “Do to ענה ואמר עשו בהם כטוב בעיניכם
 them as you see fit, so that they שלא יאבדו קהליכם מן העולם.
 will not destroy your
 communities from the
 world.”¹⁶⁶
- Heb4 [... ...] Caesar: “These people קיסר אלה האנשים יהודים
 are Jews, and are from your הם ומעם שלכם הם והנה עוסקים
 people, and behold, they deal בדברי המכשפים. [די]נו להם משפט
 with the things of magicians. התורה ואם לא אכרית לכם מן
 [Jud]ge them (according to) העולם.
 the law of the Torah, and if
 not—I will uproot you from the
 world.”
- Heb5 The king said to them: “These אמ' להם המלך האנשים האלו יהודים
 men are Jews, and you know הם ואתם יודעים דינם דימותון בהון
 their (appropriate) judgment by ולא יברחון¹⁶⁸ מן עלמא.
 which they will die, and will
 not escape from the world.”¹⁶⁷

In spite of the textual divergences in the previous passage, in the current passage all the textual witnesses agree that Tiberinus tells the Jews to try Yeshu and Yoḥanan by themselves. Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb4, and Heb5 have Tiberinus insist that since the culprits are Jews (with Ar1, JA1, and Heb4 adding ‘and of your people’), they should be tried by Jews, and not by him. Ar1, Heb1,

¹⁶⁶ Or: ‘so that your communities will not be lost from the world’.

¹⁶⁷ Or: ‘they will die, and you will not be uprooted from the world’.

¹⁶⁸ An error for יכרתון or תיכרתון?

and Heb4 also have him stress that Yeshu and Yoḥanan practised magic (with Heb1 adding, ‘which your Torah forbade’), without any reference to killing the poor maiden, who in all the textual witnesses but Heb1 is his own daughter. Thus, this passage may reflect a text in which the entire scene about Tiberinus’ daughter was not yet there, even though it is currently attested in Aramaic, Judaeo–Arabic and Hebrew textual witnesses.

In Ar1 and Heb4, Tiberinus also threatens the Jews that if they do not try Yeshu and Yoḥanan he will destroy them, though it is not entirely clear why he would punish them for not punishing the two culprits. In Heb2/Heb3, this part becomes more coherent, when Tiberinus says that the Jews should punish Yeshu and Yoḥanan, lest they lead to the Jews’ own ruin; and the expression *כאשר תחפוצו* (Heb2), and especially *כטוב בעיניכם* (Heb3) closely resembles Harkavy-B’s *כד תקין בעיניכון*, which we saw in the previous passage. In Heb5, the text may have followed a similar line of thought, but is now textually corrupt. In Heb5, we also find the expression *דימותון בהון*, which probably reflects the Aramaic text from which Heb5 was translated.

Tiberinus’ refusal to try and punish Yeshu and Yoḥanan, and his insistence that it is the Jews themselves who should do so, may be read as a distant echo of some scenes in the Gospels, such as the scene where Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean and sends him to be tried by Herod Antipas (Luke 23.6–7). But it is quite clear that our narrative—like the Babylonian Talmud—has no qualms about stating that it is the Jews who executed both Yoḥanan and Yeshu. This is, indeed, the next scene of our narrative.

7.0. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu

We are now reaching the climax of the story, with the execution of the two main culprits. Yoḥanan is crucified without much ado, but Yeshu tries to escape, is caught, and is eventually crucified.

That both John the Baptist and Jesus met violent deaths was well known in antiquity, and whereas the death of John occupies relatively little space in the Gospels (see Matt. 14.3–12, Mark 6.17–29, and Luke 9.9), the death of Jesus on the cross is the most essential fact associated with him in the Gospels, in early Christian literature, and in the ‘pagan’ and Jewish reactions to the early Christian claims. The notion of a ‘Christ crucified’ was, as Paul famously noted, ‘a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’ (Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον, ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρία) (1 Cor. 1.23), and was a fact which neither Jews nor Gentiles tried to refute, for it only proved—from their perspective—that Jesus was a criminal, and was executed as such by the Roman authorities and/or by the Jews.

7.1. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Bringing Yeshu and Yoḥanan to Tiberias and Executing Yoḥanan

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Ar1	[At that t]ime they burdened th[em with] iron (chains) ¹	[בההיא ש]עֲתָא טעינו יְתָהּ ב[פרזלא ואובילו יתהן לטבריה]
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¹ For פרזל, ‘iron’, in the sense of ‘iron manacles’, see Sokoloff (2020, 903).

- and led them to Tiberias. ואתקינו ליוחנן [אילנא³ ו] צלבו יתיה
 They set up [a tree²] for בחמ[יש ש]עי מן יומא ובתר כן קברו
 Yoḥanan, [and] crucified him יתיה.
 on the fif[th h]our of the day,
 and after this they buried
 him.
- Ar2 ...they burdened them with ... טענונון בפרזלא ואובלנון לטיבריה
 iron (chains) and led them to ונסבו ליוח[נ]ן מצבענא וצלבוניה
 Tiberias. They took Yoḥanan חמש שעי מן יומא ובתר כן קברוניה.
 the Dyer and crucified him
 (on the) fifth hour of the day,
 and after this they buried
 him.
- JA1 And they (Yeshu and פקידו ורפעו⁴ אלי בני ישראל פאוכד
 Yoḥanan) were shackled and יוחנן וקותל וצולב כמס סאעאת תם
 sent to the sons of Israel (i.e., דפן.
 to the Jews). And Yoḥanan
 was seized, and executed, and
 crucified for five hours; then
 he was buried.
- Heb1 At that time they put iron בה שעתה שמו כבלי ברזל ברגליהם
 chains on their feet, and והביאום במקום טבריא וחייבום
 brought them to the place Ti- לתלותם בעץ בתחלה תלו את יוחנן
 berias. And they found them הצבע וקברוהו.
 liable to be hung on a tree. At
 first they hung Yoḥanan the
 Dyer and buried him.

² Or: 'a cross', and see the following note.

³ This reconstruction is based on the text in Heb2 and Heb3 and in Heb4 (and cf. Heb1), but צליבא is also possible.

⁴ Or: ודפעו.

- Heb2 At that time they shackled both of them and he⁵ sent them to Tiberias which is in the town of Yahud, and he set up a tree for them. And they hung them—Yoḥanan the Dyer, the teacher of Yeshu‘a the wicked, and he died, and they buried him.
- Heb3 At that time they shackled both of them and sent them to Tiberias which is in the town of Yahud, and they set up a tree for them. And they hung Yoḥanan on the tree, and he died, and they buried him.
- Heb4 When R. Yehoshu‘a, and Marinus the elder of the Jews, and all those who were with them heard this, they took them (i.e., Yeshu and Yoḥanan), and shackled them in chains, and brought them to Tiberias. And they set up a tree for Yoḥanan the Dyer,
- בעת ההיא אמרו⁶ <את> שניהם ושלה אותם אל טבריא אשר ביהוד המדינה.⁷ ויצב להם עץ ויתלו אותם את יוחנן הצובע מלמד ישוע הרשע וימָת ויקברו אתו.
- בעת ההיא אסרו את שניהם ושלה אותם אל טבריא אשר ביהוד המדינה ויצבו להם עץ ויתלו את יוחנן על העץ וימות ויקברו אתו.
- וכאשר שמע כן ר' יהושע ומרינוס זקן היהודים וכל מי שהיה עמם לקחום ומסרו⁸ אותם בכבלים והביאום לטיבריה והתקינו עץ ליוחנן הצבע ותלו אותו בה' שעות ליום ואחר כך קברוהו.

⁵ The sentence begins with a verb in the plural, and then moves to the singular, with Tiberinus as the most likely subject.

⁶ Lege: אסרו.

⁷ This expression, which is also found in Heb3, reflects the Aramaic יהוד מדינתא. The word מדינתא can mean both 'town' and 'province'.

⁸ Lege: ואסרו.

and they hung him at five
hours of the day, and after
this they buried him.

Heb5 At that time they brought
them in iron implements⁹ into
Tiberias. And they prepared a
tree, and they hung upon it
Yoḥanan the Dyer until he
died, and they buried him.

באותה שעה הכניסום בכלי¹⁰ ברזל
לטבריה והכינו עץ ותלו עליו יוחנן
הצבע עד שמת וקברו אותו.

All the textual witnesses but one state that Yeshu and Yoḥanan were brought to Tiberias, with JA1 only saying that they were brought to the sons of Israel; however, later in the narrative, JA1 too refers to the dragging of Yeshu's dead body through the markets of Tiberias (see below, 8.9 and 9.1). This must mean that they were brought from the place where they had been imprisoned, and if this was not in Tiberias, it probably was in Ḥammat Tiberias, where much of the plot seems to take place (see our comments on 1.2 and 6.3).

Ar1, Ar2, Heb1, and Heb5 mention the iron chains in which the two culprits were bound, but Heb4 refers to shackling in chains, without mentioning iron, and JA1 and Heb2/Heb3 only refer to their being shackled. This is reminiscent of the ancient descriptions of the execution of John the Baptist both in Josephus

⁹ Or: 'in iron chains'.

¹⁰ Lege: בבבלי?

and in the Gospels, but as this was the standard manner of handling criminals and prisoners in antiquity, not much can be made of this parallel.¹¹

All the textual witnesses agree that Yoḥanan was executed first. Ar1, Ar2, and JA1 have Yoḥanan crucified, but all the Hebrew versions describe his execution as hanging on a tree. However, the Hebrew verb תלה, ‘to hang’ is often used when crucifixion is meant, including for example, in bt San 43a: ‘On the Eve of Passover they hung Yeshu (תלאוהו לישו)... and they did not find any merit for him, and they hung him (ותלאוהו) on the Eve of Passover’.¹²

Ar2, Heb4, and probably also Ar1, claim that the execution of Yoḥanan took place on the fifth hour of the day, and JA1 probably reflects a misunderstanding of that claim (and cf. the next passage, for Ibn Shaprut’s reference to the fourth hour), but this

¹¹ Josephus (*Ant.* 18.119), says that John the Baptist was brought to Machaerus in chains (δέσμιος); Mark 6.17 and Matt. 14.3 say that Herod arrested and bound (ἔδησεν) John and threw him into prison.

¹² The equation of hanging with crucifixion is, of course, much older, and can be seen already in LXX Esther 7.9, where the Hebrew תלהו, ‘hang him!’, is translated as Σταυρωθήτω, ‘let him be crucified’. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.246, 261, 266–67 and 280, also speaks of crucifixion in this context. The same equation is evident in the descriptions of Alexander Yannai’s persecution of his Jewish opponents, when the Qumran scrolls speak of hangings (in 4Q169, *Pesher Nahum*), and Josephus speaks of crucifixions (*War* 1.97 and *Ant.* 13.380). For a useful survey of the recent scholarship on the meaning of ‘crucifixion’ in ancient sources, see Harley (2019).

detail is omitted in the other textual witnesses. Within our narrative, this statement makes it clear that there was still enough time for Yeshu to escape, be caught, and be crucified, all on the same day. But the specific reference to the hour of the crucifixion also grants a more formal and ‘official’ air to the narrative, just like the references to the exact dates on which the investigation began (see above, 1.3), or the dates when Yeshu (and Yoḥanan) were executed, and when Yeshu’s body was exhumed and dragged through the streets of Tiberias (see below, 9.1), all of which add to the supposed authenticity of this would-be protocol. This specific reference may also reflect a familiarity with Christian claims about the exact hour on which Jesus was crucified (see Mark 15.25, 33–34 and cf. John 19.14). But as the rest of the narrative does not display such a direct familiarity with the Gospels, it might reflect a familiarity with later Christian traditions in which such claims were rehearsed.¹³

All the textual witnesses agree in stating that Yoḥanan was buried immediately after his execution. Heb2 is alone in referring to him as Yeshu’s teacher, but this is a claim that was already made earlier in the narrative (see above, 3.8, and our comments there).

The claim that Yoḥanan was crucified stands in marked contrast with the famous description in the Gospels (Matt. 14.8–11, Mark 6.24–28, and Luke 9.9) of how John the Baptist was beheaded, and the claim that he was executed in Tiberias stands in marked contrast with Josephus’ statement that John was executed in Machaerus (*Ant.* 18.119). However, both the Gospels

¹³ And see, for example, the *Acta Pilati* (Tischendorf 1853, 233): ‘It was about the sixth hour....’

and Josephus agree that it was Herod Antipas who had John executed, the same Herod who founded Tiberias, turned it into the capital of his tetrarchy, and built a lavish palace there (see esp. Josephus, *Life* 65–69). Thus, the claim that he had executed John in Tiberias is not entirely implausible, and modern scholars have raised this possibility in their studies of John the Baptist.¹⁴ And, as we had noted in our comments on 1.2, the entire plot of *Gzardina de-Yeshu* takes part in the Galilee, especially in Tiberias, and reflects the transfer, in late antiquity, of many Jewish traditions about the past to the Galilee. It may also reflect the *realia* of Tiberias in late antiquity, as a central city visited by governors and even emperors.¹⁵

Finally, and most importantly, we should note that our narrative makes it clear that Yoḥanan and Yeshu were executed together (even though Yeshu managed to delay his own crucifixion by escaping, before he was caught again, as we shall see below). This claim stands in marked contrast with what may be deduced both from the Gospels and from Josephus, for although the exact chronology of both executions is uncertain, they clearly did not occur at the same time.¹⁶ However, the claim that Jesus and John were executed together may be based on a very old tradition.¹⁷

¹⁴ See, for example, Marcus (2018, 215, n. 18).

¹⁵ For trials conducted in Tiberias in late antiquity see Patrich et al. (2022, 94–98), and cf. above, 1.2, n. 44.

¹⁶ For a recent discussion, and a survey of earlier scholarship, see Visi (2020).

¹⁷ As was first noted by Bammel (1968a, reprinted in Bammel 1986, 194–95).

In his *Contra Celsum*, Origen says that Celsus, in discussing the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, the appearance of the dove, and the voice that came from heaven and said ‘This is my son’, had claimed that his Jewish informant asked,

What trustworthy witness saw this apparition, or who heard a voice from heaven adopting you as son of God? There is no proof except for your word and the evidence which you may produce of one of the men who were punished with you (καί τινα ἕνα ἐπάγγη τῶν μετὰ σοῦ κεκολασμένων).¹⁸

In trying to refute this claim, Origen insists that Celsus imputed to his fictitious Jew a claim that the Jews themselves would never make, ‘For the Jews do not connect John with Jesus, nor the punishment of John with that of Jesus’ (Οὐδὲ γὰρ συνάπτουσι τὸν Ἰωάννην οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν Ἰωάννου τῇ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κολάσει).¹⁹ However, it is precisely this connection that is made by our text, when it claims that the punishment of Yoḥanan and that of Yeshu occurred at the same place and time. Thus, Celsus’ Jewish informant may have known of a tradition such as that recorded in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*.²⁰

¹⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.41 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 39), and cf. 1.48.

¹⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.48; translated by Chadwick (1965, 46).

²⁰ For a detailed defense of the authenticity of Celsus’ Jewish source, see Niehoff (2013), and cf. Carleton Paget (2017) and Lieu (2021).

7.2. Executing Yoḥanan and Yesu: Yesu Escapes by Flying in the Air

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

Ar1	And after him [they brought Ye]shu, and were about to cruci[fy h]im. But when he saw the cross set up to crucify him, [he said words of m]agic ²¹ , and flew out of [their hands], and flew in the air of the heaven like a bird.	ובתריה [איתוה ליי] שׁו ובעו לאצל[בא י]תי[ה] וכיון דחזא דצליבא קאיי למיצלב יתיה [אמר? ²² מילי דח]רשין ופרח מ[ידהון] ופ[ר]ח באור׳ שמיא כעופא.
Ar2	And after him they brought Yesu the wicked, and were about to crucify him. But [wh]en he s[aw] the cross set up to crucify him, he d[id] acts of magic, and flew out of their hands in the air of the heaven like a bird.	ובתריה איתואו ²³ לישו רשיעא ובעו למצלביה וכי[ון] דח[זא] צליבא קאים למצלביה ע[בד] מל״י ד[ח]רשין ופרח מידהון ב[א]רשא דשמיא כעופא.
IS	... ²⁴ When they proclaimed about (executing) Yesu, and	...וכדאכריזו ²⁵ על ישו ומטא עידנא למיצלביה וחזא צליבא בארבע שעי

²¹ Or: '[he did a deed of ma]gic'.

²² Or: עבד, but cf. Ar1's reading in 7.5.

²³ Lege: איתוהי.

²⁴ In Ibn Shaprut's paraphrase of the Aramaic text, the current passage comes immediately after the end of 6.7, for which see above.

²⁵ Ibn Shaprut's וכדאכריזו may reflect his recollection of bt San 43a, where the כרוז, 'crier', proclaimed the execution of Yesu for forty days before the actual event, but cf. below, 8.9, where the same verb is used in our text.

- the time came to crucify him, and he saw the cross on the fourth hour of the day, he said words of magicians and flew up and sat on Mount Carmel.
- JA1 And when Yeshu saw that the sons of Israel want to crucify him and execute him, he made a kind of magic and flew up in the air and escaped.
- Heb4 And after him they brought Yeshu the wi[cked], and wanted to hang him. And when he [saw the cr]oss standing to hang him, he d[id an act of] magi[c, and flew] in the air of the heaven like a bird.
- דיומא אמ' מלין דחרשין ופרח ויתיב בטורא דכרמל.
- פלמא נצר ישו אן בנו ישראל יריד יצלבוה ויקתלוה עמל בִּאֲבָ²⁶ מן אלסחר ותחלק פי אלהוא הֶארב.
- ואחריו הביאו לִישׁוֹ הָרָ[שע] ובקשו לתלותו וכאשר [ראה? הצ] לֹוֹב עומד לתלותו ע[שה? מעשה?] כְּשֹׁפֵן²⁷ [ת] ופרח? באויר השמים כעוף.

The following passages (7.2–7.7) are omitted by Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5, all of which move smoothly from the crucifixion of Yoḥanan to the crucifixion of Yeshu.²⁸ However, the fact that both Ar1 and Ar2 contain detailed descriptions of Yeshu's attempt to escape his fate, and that Ibn Shaprut offers an abridged paraphrase of these passages, argues for the presence of this scene in the earliest versions of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. Its omission

²⁶ Or: בִּאֲיָה, and cf. above, 6.7.

²⁷ One would expect כשפנים, or כשפנות.

²⁸ In Heb5, the scene of Yeshu's aerial flight already appeared earlier in the narrative, and see the description of this textual witness in section II.1.13 of the Introduction.

from some of the Hebrew versions may be due to textual corruption, or to the translators' or redactors' desire to avoid this scene, which may have seemed too nasty, or too childish, to some of the text's readers.

Ar1, Ar2, JA1, and Heb4 present almost identical texts, and all four textual witnesses, as well as Ibn Shaprut, have Yeshu performing a magical act and flying in the air. That Yeshu is a magician is something that we already saw (above, 2.1), but the term used to describe his magical act is either missing (in Ar1 and Heb4) or badly preserved (in Ar2 and JA1). The use of the Aramaic word מַלְאָה/מַלְאָ—literally, 'a word' or 'a thing'—in the sense of 'a magical spell' or 'a magical act' is well attested in rabbinic literature.²⁹ And חַרְשִׁין can mean both 'magicians', and the acts performed by them ('sorceries'). Ibn Shaprut has Yeshu saying words of magicians, and in JA1 the reference to סַחַר, 'magic' is clear, but it is not certain whether the translator chose the word בַּאֵב, which literally means 'gate', but also refers to 'a chapter', as well as 'a recipe' (in a magical recipe book), or the word אֵיָה, which refers to a Qur'anic verse, but also to a sign or a miracle (and cf. our comments on 6.7). And Heb4 uses the word כּוֹשְׁפוֹת [ת], which is unattested elsewhere, and may be due to textual corruption. Finally, Ibn Shaprut's text has Yeshu settling down on Mount Carmel, a point to which we shall return below (see 7.7).

The claim that Jesus tried to escape his fate was well known already in Celsus' time, since he quotes his Jewish informant as saying that 'when we had convicted him, condemned him and

²⁹ See Sperber (1994, 60–66, and esp. 66, n. 25), where he cites the current example.

decided that he should be punished, (he) was caught hiding himself and escaping most disgracefully' (κρυπτόμενος μὲν καὶ διαδιδράσκων ἐπονειδιστότατα ἔάλω).³⁰ Unfortunately, no further details are provided as to how Jesus tried to escape, and no mention is made of flying in the air. There are, however, explicit claims in late-antique Christian writers, perhaps going back to the second-century *Diatessaron*, that Jesus flew in the air (ܝܫܥ ܡܥܝܐ) in order to escape his Jewish pursuers; but in this case, the story is supposed to have taken place in Nazareth, when the Jews tried to throw Jesus off a cliff (as in Luke 4.29).³¹

Aerial flights were a common topos in ancient stories about magicians, and Yeshu's success in performing this feat would hardly have surprised early readers of our text. In the *Acts of Peter*, Simon Magus demonstrates his powers to the dwellers of Rome by flying in the air all over town, and Peter brings him hurtling down with a pious prayer to Jesus Christ.³² And in the stories told about Mani by his detractors, his teacher Terebinthus

³⁰ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.9 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 73), and cf. Bammel (1967, 326–29; reprinted in Bammel 1986) for the suggestion that echoes of Jesus' attempts to escape his persecutors may be heard in the Gospels themselves.

³¹ See the detailed study of these traditions by Baarda (1986) who already noted the possible connection with *Toledot Yeshu* (334).

³² *Acts of Peter* 32 (Lipsius and Bonnet 1891, I:82–83); for an English translation, see Hennecke and Schneemelcher (1963–1965, II:312–13). For this scene, and for stories of other magicians who could fly, see Bremmer (2002, 62–64 and 69). For the kind of magic ritual that may lurk behind some of these stories, see Mirecki (2007).

dies while apparently attempting to perform the same trick.³³ Such stories were told in the Jewish world as well, and below (in our comments on 7.4) we shall note the claims that Balaam too could use his magic tricks to fly in the air, and how he was brought down by Pineḥas the priest.

7.3. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Yehudah the Gardener Asks Permission to Chase Yeshu

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

Ar1	Yehudah [the gardener said to R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “Should I go a]fter him?” He said [to him: “G]o.”	אמ' יהודה [גננא לר' יהושע בן פרחי]ה [אזיל ב]תריה א[מ]ר [ליה זי]ל
Ar2	Yehudah the gardener said [to Rabbi] Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “What should I do? Should I go after him?” Yehoshu‘a bar Peraḥiah answered and said to him: “Go after him, and do not tarry.”	אמר יהודה [ג]ננא [לרבי] יהושע ב[ר] פרחיה מאי אעביד אִיזיל ב[ר]א תריה ענה יהושע בר פרחיה ואמר ליה זיל בתריה ולא תעכיב.
IS	R. Yehudah the gardener said to R. Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “Should I go after him and	אמ' ר' יהודה גננא לר' יהושע בן פרחיה אזיל בתריה ואתייה ³⁴ אמ' ליה זיל.

³³ See Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai* 63 (Beeson 1906, 93), and the English translation by Vermes (2001, 143); Epiphanius, *Panar.* 66.3 (Holl 1915–1933, III:21), and the English translation by Williams (2013, 230–31). For the relations between this scene and the flight of Simon Magus, see Spät (2004).

³⁴ T-S K 17.5 has ואיתייה.

bring him?” He said to him:

“Go.”

- JA1 Yehudah the gardener said to Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “Do you order me to chase him?”
 And he said to him: “Do (so) and do not tarry.”
- Heb4 R. Yehudah the gardener said to R. Yehoshu‘a: “My master, shall we go after him?” He said to him: “Go.”
- קאל יהודה אלגנאן ליהושוע בן פרחיה ת<א>מרני אן אֲלֹחָקָה פקאל לה אפעל ולא תתאכר.
 אמר ר' {יהושע} יהודה גננה לר' יהושע אדוני נל[ך] 35 אחריו אמר לו לך.

Ar2, JA1, and Heb4, as well as Ibn Shaprut, agree in having Yehudah the gardener ask Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah whether he should chase Yeshu, and having Yehoshu‘a telling him to do so; Ar2 and JA1 add that he told him not to tarry. Ar1 is badly preserved, but probably contained the same exchange as the other textual witnesses.

The reason why Yehudah has to ask this question is left unstated, but may be deduced in light of Yehudah’s subsequent use of the Ineffable Name, in the following passage.³⁶ The use of this Name was considered extremely problematic, given the explicit prohibition in the Ten Commandments and the punishment meted out to those who misused the Name.³⁷ In rabbinic literature, the same motif appears in a story of how when King David

³⁵ Or: נל[כה].

³⁶ For a fuller treatment of this issue, and of the use of the Ineffable Name in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, see Bohak (2020, esp. 90–91).

³⁷ See Exod. 20.6 and Deut. 5.10 (‘You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain’), and cf. Lev. 24.10–23.

was excavating the drainage for the Temple altar, the water of the abyss began rising and was about to flood the whole world. David then asked his advisers whether it is permissible to write the Ineffable Name on a shard and throw it into the rising water in order to force it to recede. At first, his advisers refused to answer him, but when he threatened to punish them Aḥitophel came up with an *a fortiori* argument justifying this use of the Name, even though the water might erase it off the shard.³⁸ In our text too, Yehudah's question to R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah probably reflects his need for permission from a leading religious authority to use the Ineffable Name.

7.4. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Yehudah the Gardener Recites the Name and Flies after Yeshu

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| Ar1 | [At that] moment [he (i.e., Yehudah) purified himself?] and said [the Ineffable Na]me, and flew up after him. | [בההיא] שעתא [אידיכי? ו] אָמַרְ [שמא מפר] שָׂא ופרח בתריה. |
| Ar2 | At that moment he purified himself and was cleansed, and said the word of the Ineffable Name, and flew up after him. | בהה[יא] שְׁעַתָּא אִידִכִּי וְאִתְחַוּוּר וְאִמְר מִלָּא דְשִׁמְ[י] א [מ]פּרשָׂא ופרח בתריה. |

³⁸ For this story, see bt Sukk 53a-b and bt Makk 11a, with a different version thereof in pt San 10.2 (29a), and cf. Sperber (1966; reprinted in Sperber 1994, 47–54) and Heinemann (1974, 17–26).

IS	He purified himself and said the Ineffable Name and went and flew up after him.	אדכא ואמ' שמיה דמפרש ³⁹ ואזיל ופרח בתרייה.
JA1	He purified himself and prayed and recited the secret holy Name and flew up after him.	פתטהר וצלא ודכר אלאסם אלמכזון אלמוקדס ותחלק וראה.
Heb4	At that moment R. Yehudah purified himself, and said the Ineffable Name, and flew up after him.	בשעה ההיא נטהר ר' יהודה ואמר שם המפורש ועף אחריו.

All the extant textual witnesses claim that Yehudah purified himself before reciting the Ineffable Name, with Ibn Shaprut and Heb4, and probably Ar1 as well, using a single verb for this procedure, Ar2 using two different verbs for the act of self-purification, and JA1 speaking of self-purification and prayer. And they all agree that once Yehudah recited the Ineffable Name, he flew up right after Yeshu. In the Aramaic texts, we may even see a little pun, which probably was intended, as the permission granted by *בן פרחיה* enables Yehudah to *פרח* after Yeshu by using

³⁹ The text of Ibn Shaprut edited by Krauss (1902, 146), reads: אדכר ואמר שמיה דמריה ר(וצה) ל(ומר) שם המפורש 'he recited and said the Name of his Master, that is, the Ineffable Name'. The phrase שמיה דמריה, 'the Name of his Master', is based on the famous story in *bt Gitt* 68a, of how Ashmedai was caught with a chain and a ring on which the Ineffable Name was written. Benayahu threw the chain at him and cried, שמא דמרך עלך שם דמרך עלך, 'The Name of your Master is upon you, the Name of your Master is upon you'. The words שם המפורש ל(ומר) ר(וצה), 'that is, the Ineffable Name', are an interpretive gloss, probably added by a later scribe. And אדכר is a scribal error for אדכי.

the Ineffable Name, יה(וה); this pun is lost both in the Hebrew and in the Judaeo–Arabic versions.⁴⁰

The scene of the aerial battle between Yehudah and Yeshu is one of the most celebrated scenes in the whole of the *Toledot Yeshu* literature.⁴¹ However, in contrast with the ‘Helena’ version of *Toledot Yeshu*, and even with Harkavy-B, where Yeshu steals the Ineffable Name from the Jerusalem Temple and uses it to perform his magical feats, in our narrative Yeshu uses his magic, and it is Yehudah the gardener who uses the Name in order to overcome him.⁴²

That the Ineffable Name has great powers was an assumption shared by many Jews in antiquity, but it was also assumed that these powers should not be used lightly, and should be reserved for the most dire circumstances.⁴³ Moreover, the use of the Name required special preparations; in the Hekhalot texts, it is assumed that one must stand up before reciting the Ineffable Name, and in rabbinic literature it is stated that the Name should only be transmitted (from a teacher to his disciple) while standing

⁴⁰ For this pun, see already Bassier (1993, 274), and Reiner (1998, 258).

⁴¹ For the different versions of this scene, see Mazo Karras (2013).

⁴² See further Bohak (2020, esp. 89–91).

⁴³ For the rabbinic discussions of the powers of the Ineffable Name, and the circumstances under which it may be divulged to others or put into use, see Urbach (1975, 124–34), and cf. Becker (2002) and Stein (2004, 236–57).

up, and only in a pure place.⁴⁴ However, our text goes a step further, and assumes that reciting the Name demands the prior purification of one's body, so as to recite it in purity.⁴⁵

The use of the Ineffable Name for the purpose of aerial flight seems to have been a common topos in the Jewish literature of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. One famous story in the Babylonian Talmud has the sages of Athens test R. Yehoshu'a by asking him to build a house in the air, so he 'said a (or, the) Name, and was suspended between heaven and earth (אמר שם תלא בין רקיעא לארעא), and told them, "Lift up for me bricks and mortar"', which, of course, they could not do.⁴⁶ Another story, found in the *Midrash of the Ten Martyrs*, relates how 'R. Yishma'el stood up, recited the Ineffable Name (עמד ר' ישמעאל) (והזכיר שם המפורש), and the storm-wind suspended him until he

⁴⁴ See, for example, Schäfer (1981, §512): זה שם המפורש... אל תזכרהו מיושב: 'This is the Ineffable Name... do not recite it while sitting down, but while standing up', with additional examples in Bohak (2014b, 440 and n. 269). And cf. Eccl. R. 3.11 (Hirshman 2016, 200): 'ואין מוסרין אותו אלא מעומד. ואין מוסרין אותו אלא במקום טהור ועל המים', 'And one transmits it (i.e., the Ineffable Name) only while standing up, and one transmits it only in a pure place, and over water', and the famous story in m Ta'an 3.8 about Ḥoni the circle maker, who 'drew a circle, and stood within it, and said "...I swear by your Great Name..."'.

⁴⁵ For a medieval parallel, see Gil (1979, 104–5): 'And they recited the Ineffable Name in holiness and purity' (ויזכירו שם המפורש בקדושה ובטהרה). For a broader survey of such rituals, see Swartz (1994b).

⁴⁶ See bt Bek 8a, and cf. the story in bt Gitt 68b, of how Ashmedai swallowed the signet-ring of Solomon (on which the Ineffable Name was inscribed) and 'placed one of his wings in heaven, and the other wing on the earth'.

ascended to heaven' (ותלה אותו רוח סערה עד שעלה למרום).⁴⁷ And in another famous story, found in the *Alphabeta of Ben Sira*, we learn how when Adam's first wife Lilith had a quarrel with her husband she 'recited the Ineffable Name, and flew in the air and escaped' (זכרה את שם המפורש ופרחה באויר וברחה).⁴⁸ Finally, we may note a variant of this claim in a story found in *Midrash Tehillim*, of how, seeking to help King David escape his pursuers, 'Avishai recited the Ineffable Name and placed him (i.e., David) in the air, between heaven and earth' (אידכר אבישי שם המפורש ואוקמיה באוירא בין (שמיא ובין ארעא)).⁴⁹

However, the closest parallel to our scene is found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, where we read that,

When Balaam the guilty (בלעם חייבא) saw Pineḥas the priest chasing him, he did a thing of magicians and flew up in the air of heaven (עבד מלתא דקוסמין ופרח באויר שמיא); immediately Pineḥas recited the great and holy name and flew after him (אדכר שמא רבא וקדישא ופרח בתרוי) and caught him by the head and brought him down.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See Reeg (1985, 22*–23*).

⁴⁸ See Yassif (1984, 232), and cf. the *Midrash of Shemḥazai ve-Azael*, in which the angel Shemḥazai teaches an earthly woman the Ineffable Name with which he ascends to heaven, and she recites it and ascends to heaven herself (see Jellinek 1853–1857, IV:127).

⁴⁹ See *Midrash Tehillim* 18.30 (Buber 1891, 159).

⁵⁰ Pseudo-Jonathan to Num. 31.8, and cf. Tanhuma, Maṭot 4: 'And if you see that wicked person (i.e., Balaam) performing magic and flying in the air (עושה כשפים ופורח באויר), show him the (golden) plate on which it is written 'Holy to YHWH' (Exod. 28.36) and he will fall down'. For the claim that Pineḥas killed Balaam, see also bt San 106b. And see Shinan (1992, 136–37).

The fact that the rabbinic stories about Balaam are laced with anti-Christian polemics, and that one of the few explicit rabbinic references to Jesus (bt Gitt 56b–57a) couples him with Balaam and Titus as three arch-enemies of the Jews, makes this parallel even more revealing.⁵¹ This raises the question of which of the two stories came first. Were the authors of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* familiar with the story of Balaam and Pineḥas, and adapted it to their own needs, or was this story first told about Yeshu, and then re-told about Balaam, with a possible wink to ‘that man’, whom it was no longer safe to blaspheme in such an open manner?⁵² My own assumption is that the story about Yeshu came first, but without external evidence this would be very hard to prove—or to refute.

Before leaving this passage, one last comment is in order. Like the rest of our narrative, this scene too takes place in Tiberias, a town whose Jewish residents seem to have had quite a lively interest in the exact nature of the Ineffable Name, as we already noted above.⁵³ It is this interest—coupled with the knowledge that by reciting the Ineffable Name one can fly in the air—that may have given rise to our scene in the first place.

⁵¹ See Urbach (1956; reprinted in Urbach 1988, 537–55); Baskin (1983, 75–113, esp. 91–93); Schäfer (2007, 31–33, 84–92); Nikolsky (2008, esp. 224); Murcia (2014a, 497–669). And cf. above, our comments on 3.6.

⁵² A third possibility, that both stories independently adapted a story in which some other culprit fled his fate by using magic to fly in the air, and a ‘good Jew’ brought him down with the help of the Ineffable Name, seems to me far less likely.

⁵³ See section V.2 of the Introduction.

7.5. Executing Yoḥanan and Yesu: Yesu Hides in the Cave of Elijah

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| Ar1 | When Yesu the [wicked saw him] (i.e., Yehudah), he went and hid himself in the cave of Elijah, and he said words of magic and shut the mouth of the cave. | וכיון [דחזיה] יישו [רשיע] אֶזְלָא
ואיטמר במערתא דאליהו ואמ' מילי
דחרשין וסגר פומא דמערתא. |
| Ar2 | When Yesu saw (this), he went (and) hid himself in the cave of Elijah, and he said [words of] magic and shut the mouth of the cave. | וכיון דחזא ישו [א]זל איטמר
במערתא דאליהו ואמר [מילי
ד]חֲרָשִׁין וסגר פומא דמערתא. |
| IS | At the point when he (i.e., Yehudah) was about to overtake him, Yesu said words of magicians and entered the cave of Elijah and held the opening. | בהדי דבעא למסביה אמ' ישו מילי
דחרשי ועל למערתא דאליהו ואחד
פתחא. |
| JA1 | When Yesu saw him, he entered and hid in the cave of Elijah, peace be upon him, and shut the mouth of the cave with a gate of magic. | פלמא ראה ישו דכל פֿאַכטבא פי
מגארת אליהו עליה אלסלאם וסד פס
אלמגארא בבאב מן אלסחר. |
| Heb4 | When Yesu saw R. Yehudah behind him, he went and hid himself in the cave of Elijah, and he said words of a spell, and the mouth of the cave was shut. | וכאשר ראה יישו לר' יהודה אחריו
הלך ונטמן במערת אליהו ואמר דברי
לחש ונסגרה פי המערה. |

All five textual witnesses agree that Yesu hid himself in the cave of Elijah (for which see 1 Kgs 19.9, 13), and all but Ibn Shaprut state that he used his magic to seal it from the inside. The texts do not state where this cave was, but the references to Mt Carmel by Ibn Shaprut (see above, 7.2) and in Ar1 and Heb4 (see below, 7.7) suggests that according to these textual witnesses this is where this scene is supposed to take place. Today, a cave of Elijah is shown on the lower northern slopes of Mt Carmel. It began its life as a ‘pagan’ shrine, and was claimed as the cave of Elijah at an unknown date, probably in the Early Byzantine period.⁵⁴ Moreover, it is quite likely that the references to Mt Carmel are not to the one which overlooks the Mediterranean, but to the mountain above Tiberias, as we shall note below, in our comments on 7.7.

The connection between Yesu and Elijah is somewhat unexpected in an anti-Christian text, as this is a connection often made in Christian discourse, from the New Testament onwards. In the Gospels, the question is raised whether Jesus or John the Baptist are in fact Elijah, and Elijah joins Moses in the scene of Jesus’ Transfiguration.⁵⁵ In our own narrative, the reference to

⁵⁴ See Ovadia and Pierri (2012a, esp. 66, and 2012b); both papers were revised and republished as Ovadia and Pierri (2015, see esp. 52); Ilan (2017, esp. 285). For the inscriptions found there, see Ameling et al. (2023, nos 6435–6614).

⁵⁵ For the claim that Jesus is Elijah, see Matt. 16.14 and Mark 8.28; for the claim that John is Elijah, see Matt. 11.14, 17.10–13 and cf. Luke 1.17. For Elijah’s presence at the Transfiguration, see Matt. 17.1–8, Mark 9.2–8, Luke 9.28–36.

Elijah's cave probably was intended to prove that even this trick could not save Yeshu, and that the Christian attempts to demonstrate a connection between Elijah and Jesus were utterly vacuous.

The claim that Jesus hid himself from his persecutors may have been known to Celsus, for he is cited by Origen as quoting his Jewish informant as saying, 'But what messenger that has been sent ever hid himself (κρύπτεται) when he ought to be delivering the message that he had been commanded to proclaim?'⁵⁶ Origen insists that Jesus did not hide himself (οὐ γὰρ ἐκρύπτετο), and refutes this claim by quoting Jesus' saying in Mark 14.49 and Matt. 26.55 that he had been teaching every day in the Temple. This implies that the accusation that Jesus was hiding was unrelated to his crucifixion, and was perhaps related to him being caught in the garden on the outskirts of Jerusalem. However, as we have no direct access to Celsus' own text, we cannot tell what he—or his Jewish informant—had in mind, and it is possible that he was familiar with a story of how Jesus tried to hide from his Jewish opponents in order to escape his dire fate.

A story of Jesus hiding in a cave in or near Tiberias resurfaces in Christian sources of the Crusader period. The Russian Abbot Daniel, who visited Palestine in 1107–1108 CE, saw in Tiberias a cave with a spring, into which—he says—Jesus fled when the people wished to make him king of the Galilee.⁵⁷ It is not clear which story about Jesus Daniel had in mind, but it is

⁵⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.70 (translated by Chadwick 1965, 120).

⁵⁷ See Wilkinson (1988, 159); Raba (1987, 71); Pringle (1993–2009, II:364, no. 266).

tempting to think that traditions about a specific cave near Tiberias in which Jesus hid himself in order not to be caught by the Jews are a distant echo of the current scene of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*. And as we noted in our comments on 0.13, al-Harawī saw in Tiberias a spring associated with Jesus, and later Christian pilgrims saw in Tiberias the tree which grew from the firebrand that one of the Jews had supposedly thrown at Jesus, although no cave is mentioned in this context.⁵⁸ Finally, Nahmanides is quoted in the Barcelona disputation of 1263 as saying that Jesus ‘was pursued by his enemies and hid himself from them, falling finally into their power whence he was not able to liberate himself’, but this claim probably was based on one of the *Toledot Yeshu* texts themselves, and does not preserve a local oral tradition.⁵⁹

7.6. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Yehudah Opens the Locked Cave

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

Ar1	R. Yehudah came to the opening of the cave, and said	אֲתָא ר' יְהוּדָה גִּנְגָא לַפִּתְחָא דְּמַרְעֵתִי ⁶⁰ וְאָמַר לֵה פִּתְחָא פִּתְחָא
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⁵⁸ For this story, see, for example, Ps.-Odoric, *De terra sancta* 7 (in Laurent 1864, 147).

⁵⁹ See Horbury (1970, 112–13).

⁶⁰ Lege: דְּמַרְעֵתָא. A triangular sign above the *resh* probably points to the scribe's, or a reader's, awareness of the transposition of the *resh* and the *ayin*.

	to it: "Opening, opening, open up! For I am [the] messenger of the Great God." When the opening of the cave heard (this), it opened up.	איפתחי ⁶¹ דא[נ]א שליח[א] דאלהא רבה כיון דשמע פיתחא דמערתא איפתח.
Ar2	Yehudah the gardener [came], and said the word of the [Ineffable] Name, and the mouth of the cave opened up.	[ואתא י' יהודה גננא ואמר מילא דשמא [מפרש] א ואיפתח פומה דמערתא.
IS	Yehudah the gardener came and said to the cave: "Open up! For I am the messenger of God." (And it) opened up.	אתא ר' יהודה גננא ואמ' למערתא אפתחי דשלחא דאלהא אנא אפתחא.
JA1	Yehudah the gardener came and opened the cave's gate by the Name of God the Exalted, the Majestic.	פגא יהודה אלגנאן פפתח באב אלמגארא באסם אללה גל ועז.
Heb4	...and he said thus: "Opening, opening, open up! For I am the messenger of the Holy One, blessed be He." When the opening of the cave heard this, it opened up.	... ואמר כן פתח פתח פתחי שאני שלוחו של ה'ק'ב'ה' כאשר שמע פתח המערה כן נפתח[ח].

⁶¹ One would expect the masculine form, איפתח, but note how in Ibn Shaprut's text the feminine imperative is addressed to the cave (f.) and not to the opening (m.).

⁶² Some words were omitted from the text here (e.g., ובא ר' יהודה הגנן אל, פי המערה, etc.), probably due to homoioteleuton with the previous sentence.

All five textual witnesses agree that Yehudah the gardener managed to open up from the outside the cave that Yeshu had closed from the inside, but are divided on how he did this. Ar2 and JA1 state that he recited the Ineffable Name, just as he had done when he wished to fly in the air and chase Yeshu (see above, 7.4). But Ar1 and Heb4 have Yehudah commanding the cave to open up and stating that he is a messenger of God, and this text is also reflected in Ibn Shaprut's paraphrase.⁶³ The spell recited by Yehudah the gardener, according to these textual witnesses, finds ample parallels elsewhere in ancient literary and magical texts.⁶⁴ In one famous rabbinic story, Rabbi Eliezer says 'Carob tree, carob tree... be uprooted!' (חרוביתא, חרוביתא... איתעוקרין); in another, Rabbi Shime'on bar Yoḥai says 'Valley, valley, be filled with gold dinars' (בקעה, בקעה, המלאי דינרי זהב); and in both cases, the rabbi's command is immediately obeyed.⁶⁵ In an Aramaic *piyyut* from late antiquity, God tells Moses to go to the Red Sea and command it to 'move before me... for I am the messenger of the

⁶³ In Ibn Shaprut's text, one may also note a possible misunderstanding of the Aramaic text, for whereas the first אפתחי is an imperative, the second אפתחא should have referred to the cave opening up in obedience to Yehudah's command, but may have been understood by Ibn Shaprut as another imperative.

⁶⁴ For the following discussion, see Bohak (2020, 92–94).

⁶⁵ For Rabbi Eliezer, see pt MoQ 3.1 (81d); for Rabbi Shime'on bar Yoḥai, see pt Ber 9.1 (13d) and Gen. R. 35.2 (Theodor and Albeck 1912–1927, 329). For another example, see bt Ta'an. 24a: 'Fig tree, fig tree, bring forth your fruits' (תאנה, תאנה, הוציא פירותיך).

Creator of World' (דאנא שליחיה דיוצר בראשית).⁶⁶ Similar formulae are also attested in the Aramaic incantation bowls from late-antique Mesopotamia and are echoed in the *Sword of Moses*.⁶⁷ But perhaps the closest parallel is provided by a recipe for opening locked doors found in the Greek magical papyri, where the spell first orders the door in Coptic 'Open up for me, open up for me, door bolt', and then repeats the command in Greek 'be opened, be opened, door bolt, because I am Horus the Great, (here come some magic words) son of Osiris and Isis. I want the godless Typhon to flee'.⁶⁸ Here, we have all the components of our Aramaic spell, including naming the object that is being commanded, the command itself, and the self-identification as a messenger of God, or as a god, which is why the command must be obeyed. Even

⁶⁶ Another version reads 'the messenger of the King of Glory' (שליחיה דמלך הכבוד). See Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 82–83), and cf. Lieber (2018, 21). As noted by Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 83), the expression 'the messenger of the creator of the World' re-appears in *Midrash Va-Yosha* (Jellinek 1853–1857, I:38), in a passage that clearly depends on this *piyyut*. And cf. Song of Songs Rabbah 7.9: אִישׁתִּבֶּעַ לְצִיצָה וְאֵם לִי בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם אֲנִי וְשִׁלּוּחִי שֶׁל הַקֵּב"ה אֲנִי (Daniel) adjured the golden plate and said to it: "I am flesh and blood, and I am the messenger of the Holy One, blessed be He".

⁶⁷ For the appearance of such formulae in the Aramaic incantation bowls, and for earlier Mesopotamian parallels, see Ford and Morgenstern (2020, 36–37). In the *Sword of Moses*, it is an angel who is described as the 'swift messenger' (שליחא קלילא) of God, and see Harari (1997, 26 and 106–9).

⁶⁸ PGM XXXVI.312–20; for the Greek and Coptic texts, see Preisendanz (1928–1931, II:173–74); for an English translation, see Betz (1986, 277).

the duplication of one textual element is found here, except that in the Jewish spell it is the object being commanded that is mentioned twice, whereas in the ‘pagan’ one it is the command itself that is duplicated.⁶⁹

Given the popularity of such spells in antiquity, it stands to reason that this was the more original version of our text, and that this spell was omitted from the text, and replaced by a second recourse to the Ineffable Name, by an editor who wanted to make sure that the ‘good Jews’ of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* make no use of magic.⁷⁰ However, no certainty is possible on this score, and the fact that both versions of this passage are attested already in the Aramaic texts shows once again that our text was malleable, and given to minor modifications, already in the earliest stages of its transmission history.

7.7. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Yeshu Turns Himself into a Rooster, but is Caught by Yehudah the Gardener

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, JA1, Heb4 (this passage is omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)

⁶⁹ For many such parallels between Jewish magical spells and Graeco-Egyptian ones, see Bohak (2008, esp. 227–90).

⁷⁰ It is even possible that the original author was familiar with Jesus’ use of the same imperative form of פתח, transliterated in the Gospel of Mark as Ἐφφαθά and translated as διανοίχθητι, ‘Open up’, to heal a deaf and mute person (Mark 7.32–35). However, the text as a whole displays very little familiarity with the Gospels.

- Ar1 And Yeshu the wicked [disg]uised himself as a rooster,⁷¹ and went and sat on Mount Carmel, until R. Yehudah the gardener came and held him with his cloak, and brought him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah.
- Ar2 And Yeshu [dis]guised himself as a bird, until R. Yehudah the gardener came and held him with his cloak, and brought him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah.
- IS Yeshu turned himself into a rooster.⁷³ R. Yehudah grabbed him with the cloak of his sheet,⁷⁴ and brought him before R. Yehoshu'a and the Sages, etc.⁷⁵
- ויישו רשיעא [אד]מי⁷² {ג} נפשי[ה] כציפרא דתרנולא ואזל ויתיב בטורא דכרמלא עד דאתא ר' יה[ו] דה' גננא ואחדיה בשושיפא ידיה ואיתייה קדם ר' יהושע בן פרחיה.
- וישו [אי]דמי נפשיה בציפרא עד דאתא ר' יהודה גננא ואחדיה בשושיפיה ואיתייה קמי רבי יהושע בן פרחיה.
- עביד גרמיה ישו כצפרא דתרנולא⁷⁶ נקטיה ר' יהודה בשושיפא דסדיניה⁷⁷ ואתיה קמא ר' יהושע וחבריא כו'.

⁷¹ Lit., 'a rooster bird'.

⁷² The reading of this word is uncertain, as there might be one more letter—a *samekh* or a final *mem*—at the end of the line.

⁷³ Lit., 'a rooster bird'.

⁷⁴ The phrase שושיפא דסדינא makes no sense, and סדינא probably was a gloss, explaining the rare word שושיפא. See already Ginzberg (1928, 326).

⁷⁵ Ibn Shaprut's paraphrase of the Aramaic text ends here.

⁷⁶ T-S K 17.5 and Krauss (1902, 146), have דתרנולא, which is closer to the Hebrew תרנול, but תרנולא is well attested in Aramaic, and see Sokoloff (2017, 685) and Sokoloff (2020, 1217).

⁷⁷ T-S K 17.5 has דשושיפא דסדינא, which makes even less sense; Krauss (1902, 146), has בשושיפא דסדינא.

- JA1 And Yeshu disguised himself as a bird, and Yehudah took his headscarf and threw it on him. And they caught him and arrested him and he was brought to Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah.
- Heb4 Yeshu the wicked made [himself? like] a rooster,⁷⁸ and went [and sat?] on Mount Carmel. And R. [Yehudah] the gardener came and held him by his hand, and br[ough]t him before R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah.
- פתשבה ישו בטיר פאכד יהודה רדתה ורמהא עליה פאכדוה וקבצוה ואחצר אלי יהושע בן פרחיה.
- [ו]יִישׁוֹ הִרְשַׁע עָשָׂה [עֲצָמוֹ? כְּצִיֵּף] וְרָתַגְלוֹת וְהֵלֵךְ [וַיֵּשֶׁב? בָּהֶ] הָרֹכֶמֶל וּבָא ר' [יְהוּדָה] גִּנְנָה וְאַחֲזוּ בִידוֹ וְהֵב[ִיא] לְפָנַי ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פֶּרַח[ִיָּה].

Four of the five textual witnesses claim that Yeshu turned himself into a rooster, with JA1 referring to 'a bird', without further specification. But the textual witnesses diverge when it comes to the place where this scene is supposed to take place: Ar2, Ibn Shaprut, and JA1 mention no specific location; but Ar1 and Heb4 refer to Mt Carmel, and this location had already been mentioned by Ibn Shaprut at an earlier passage (above, 7.2). In JA1, Yehudah's cloak becomes a *ḥub*, 'a small turban', but perhaps in the sense of *ḥub*, 'a cloak'.⁷⁹ And in Heb4, the claim that Yehudah held Yeshu by his hand probably is due to a mistranslation from the Aramaic *שושיפא ידיה*; the first word apparently was unknown

⁷⁸ Lit., 'a rooster bi[rd]'.

⁷⁹ For *ḥub*, see Blau (2006, 245), who quotes Maimonides' statement that this word is used in the Maghreb for what in Egypt would be called a *تلشيمة*. For *ḥub* see Wehr (1961, 336).

to the translator, and he mistook the second as ד-ידיה, ‘of his hand’, rather than ‘his’.

Yeshu’s ability to morph into an animal is reminiscent of ancient stories of powerful magicians, as when in a Demotic Egyptian tale copied in Roman Egypt an evil magician turns himself into a wild gander (or, a bird), in order to flee his pursuers, but is quickly caught, or when a powerful witch in Apuleius’ ‘Golden Ass’ turns herself into an owl and flies away.⁸⁰ The claim that Yeshu turned himself into a rooster might be a distant echo of the Gospels’ accounts of Peter’s denial of Christ (Matt. 26.34, 74–75; Mark 14.30, 68, 72; Luke 22.34, 60–61; John 13.38, 18.27), or of later apocryphal accounts that relate how Jesus revived a dead rooster.⁸¹ But in the Jewish world it was mainly demons who could morph into any shape they wished, and in rabbinic literature it is Satan himself who turns himself into a bird, a deer, a poor man, and so on, in stories that use the same verb (אידימי) that is used here.⁸² The same verb appears in the Babylonian incantation bowls, where it refers to the shape-shifting demons, who appear to human beings in the form of different animals.⁸³ Within this cultural framework, the choice of a rooster

⁸⁰ See Setne II, translated by Lichtheim (1973–1980, II:138–51, esp. 149), and Apuleius, *Met.* 3.21 (and cf. 2.22), with Phillips (2019).

⁸¹ See Piovanelli (2011).

⁸² See *bt San* 95a, where Satan appears to King David in the form of a deer (אתא שטן ואדמי ליה כטביא); *bt San* 107a, where he appears to him as a bird (אתא שטן אידימי ליה כציפרתא); *bt Kidd* 81a, where he appears to Plimo in the form of a poor man (אידימי ליה כעניא).

⁸³ See, for example, Moriggi (2013).

may be connected with the assumption that demons have chicken legs, which is attested both in rabbinic literature and in the incantation bowls.⁸⁴ Thus, our text assumes that for Yeshu, being a magician, morphing into a rooster is also possible, even though this ability was not mentioned in the list of the miracles that he—or he and Yoḥanan—claimed that he, or they, could perform (see above, 6.5).

The reference to the Carmel may have been intended to highlight the connection with the cave of Elijah, mentioned in 7.5.⁸⁵ But it may also be based on a kind of a *midrash* on Amos 9.2–3, where God vows to destroy His enemies, insisting that,

If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them;
if they rise up to Heaven, from there I will bring them
down. And if they hide on the top of the Carmel, from there
I will search and take them; and if they hide from my sight
at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the
serpent, and it shall bite them.⁸⁶

Of the four places where God's enemies might hide—the Underworld, the Heaven, the Carmel, and the sea—those textual witnesses that mention the Carmel mention two (the heavens and

⁸⁴ See bt Ber 6a and Gitt 68b (with Rashi ad loc.). For demons with chicken legs in the Babylonian incantation bowls, see Viložny (2015, 141–42), and Viložny (2017, 50–51).

⁸⁵ This would apply even if the site which is now known as the Cave of Elijah was not yet identified as such by the time our text was written, since the connection between Elijah and Mt Carmel was well known from the Hebrew Bible itself (1 Kgs 18.17–40).

⁸⁶ And cf. Bammel (1997b, 17, n. 22).

the Carmel). This may be a coincidence, but if it is not, it probably suggests that the reference to the Carmel is a later addition, added by someone who made the *midrashic* connection with Amos 9, rather than an original part of the text, which was omitted by some of the textual witnesses.

However, a second possibility is that our text does not refer to the famous Mt Carmel, overlooking the Mediterranean, but to the mountain above Tiberias. That this mountain was sometimes called Carmel is evident from two statements in *bt Shab* 35a, which speak of watching the well of Miriam (which, according to legend, accompanied the Israelites in the desert, and then sunk into the Sea of Galilee) from the Carmel, and of going down from the Carmel to wash in the sea (of Tiberias).⁸⁷ It is also evident from several medieval sources that speak of Mt Carmel in the vicinity of Tiberias.⁸⁸ In such a case, it would seem more likely that the reference to Mt Carmel was there in the earliest version of our text, but was removed by some of its later copyists, who did not know of this Galilean tradition, and did know that the biblical Mt Carmel was quite far from Tiberias—too far to have Yesu hiding there.

Finally, the claim—shared by Ar1, Ar2, and Ibn Shaprut—that it was with his שׁוּשִׁיפָּא that Yehudah caught Yesu may also contain a literary allusion. In the Aramaic Targum to 1 Kgs 19.13 (‘And when Elijah heard this he wrapped his face with his cloak,

⁸⁷ See the textual witnesses for *bt Shab* 35a, as recorded in the Hachi Garsinan module of the Friedberg website (<https://fjms.genizah.org>), and the detailed discussion by Reiner (1998, 236–39 and 255–56).

⁸⁸ See Reiner (1998, 236, and 239, n. 39).

and he came out and stood at the opening of the cave'), the word used for Elijah's cloak is שְׂשִׁיפִיָּה.⁸⁹ Here too, the recurrence of Elijah, his cave, its opening, and a cloak may be pure coincidence, but may also be a deliberate polemical move. In this reenactment of an action taken by Elijah in his cave, it is not Yeshu, but Yehudah the gardener, who plays Elijah's role, when he uses his cloak to catch Yeshu the wicked.

7.8. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu: Yeshu is Crucified

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, JA1, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Ar1	And [they raised him up], and they crucified him on a cabbage stalk.	וא[סקוהי] וצלבוהי על כנא דכרובא. ⁹⁰
Ar2	And they raised Yeshu the wicked up, and crucified him on a cabbage stalk.	ואסקוה לישו רשיעא וצלבוה על כנא דכרובא.
JA1	And they raised him up, and they crucified him on a root of a cabbage.	פא{צ}עעדותו וצלבוה עלי אצל מן אלכרנב.
Heb1	Afterwards they hung Yeshu the wicked on the tree, the root of the cabbage.	אחר כן תלו את יישו הרשע על העץ שורש הכרוב.

⁸⁹ The Hebrew verse reads, וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵיו וַיִּלֶּט פָּנָיו בְּאֲדָרְתוֹ וַיֵּצֵא וַיַּעֲמֵד פָּתַח וְהָיָה כִּד שְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵיו וַכְּרִיד אֶפְוָהּ; the text in Targum Jonathan is בְּשׂוֹשִׁיפִיָּה וַנִּפְק וְקָם בְּתֵרַע מְעִרְתָּא. The same Aramaic word is used for Elijah's cloak in verse 19, as well as in 2 Kgs 2.8, 13–14.

⁹⁰ The reading of the last word is uncertain, and it may have been corrected by the scribe. On the right margin, a later scribe wrote, vertically to the text: דכרובא.

Heb2	And after him (i.e., Yoḥanan) they raised Yeshu'a the wicked up to the tree. ⁹¹	ואחריו העלו את ישוע הרשע. וימת [ו]יקברו {העל} אותו ואחריו העלו את ישוע הרשע ⁹² אֶל העץ
Heb3	And after him they hung Yeshu'a the wicked on the tree.	ואחריו תלו את ישוע הרשע על העץ.
Heb4	And they raised him up and they hung him on the stem of the cabbage (?), which is sprouting (?). ⁹³	והעלו אותו ויתלוהו על הקנֶה שלאקרבין ⁹⁴ שהוא מְנביט. ⁹⁵
Heb5	And after him they hung Yeshu the wicked.	ואחריו תלו ישו רשיעא.

Whereas passages 7.2–7.7, that describe Yeshu's attempts to escape his fate after Yoḥanan had already been crucified, were omitted in Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5, this and the following passages are covered by all the extant textual witnesses. The crucifixion of Yeshu is described by a single, short, sentence, but

⁹¹ In my translation, I ignore the dittography, and restore אֶל העץ to its correct location.

⁹² The words 'וימת... הרשע' are a dittography, partly duplicating what was said in 7.1, which is the previous passage in Heb2.

⁹³ Or: 'that is, cabbage' (see the following notes).

⁹⁴ The word אַקרבין probably reflects the spelling אַכרוב for ברוב, 'cabbage', a spelling that is well attested in ancient manuscripts; see, for example, MS Kaufmann A50 at m Shev 9.1, Or 3.7 and Ukz 1.4, or MS Leiden Scaliger 3 for pt Kil. 5.8 (30a) and elsewhere. The Hebrew translator probably was puzzled by this form, and rendered it as אַקרבין.

⁹⁵ The word מְנביט is puzzling. One possible explanation is that the word should be קנביט, i.e., קַנְבִּיט, an alternative form of קַנְבִּיט, 'cauliflower'. For the relations between קַנְבִּיט and cabbage see Löw 1881, no. 161, and Shy (2005, 52), s.v. אַספרגוס. However, the traces of the first letter—which we deciphered as a *mem*—hardly look like a *qof* or a *qof* + *waw*.

more details will be provided later in the narrative, in 8.2. However, the current passage includes one of the most famous motifs in the entire narrative. Ar1, Ar2, JA1, and Heb1 all agree that Yeshu was crucified on the stalk (Ar1 and Ar2), or the root (JA1 and Heb1) of a cabbage, and the same claim probably lies behind the corrupt text in Heb4. Only Heb2/Heb3 and Heb5 omit this detail and state that Yeshu was hung on a tree (Heb2/Heb3), or simply hung (Heb5). And as Heb2/Heb3 and Heb5 often preserve a revised text, there is no doubt that the claim that Yeshu was crucified on a cabbage stalk was there in the earliest versions of our text.⁹⁶

The claim that Jesus was crucified on a cabbage stalk clearly enjoyed a wide circulation at least by the tenth or eleventh century, when the poet Yosef Ibn Avitur castigated those who ‘swear by the one who was hung on a stalk of cabbage’ (הנשבעים בתלוי על קלח כרוב).⁹⁷ And it was much expanded in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, as we shall note below.

The polemical use of an unexpected tree on which to imagine the hanging or crucifixion of one’s enemy is quite a common topos.⁹⁸ In late-antique Judaism, much energy was spent discussing the tree on which Haman and his ten sons were hung (as in

⁹⁶ For earlier discussions of this motif, see Newman (1999); Meerson (2011, 186–91); Stökl ben Ezra (2020, 54–57).

⁹⁷ See Rand (2013, 7 and 11–12).

⁹⁸ Note, for example, how during the American Civil War the Union Army soldiers sang that ‘They will hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree!’. For the lyrics of ‘John Brown’s Body’, and their use during the War, see Stauffer and Soskis (2013, esp. 42–72).

Est. 7.9–10, 8.7, 9.13 and 22, and cf. 5.14 and 6.4).⁹⁹ In one late *midrash*, we read how when Haman looked for a tree on which to crucify Mordechai—the tree on which he himself would later be crucified—God summoned all the trees, to see on which one the villain should be crucified. Many different trees offered themselves, each providing biblical prooftexts to support its own claim, but eventually the thorn offered itself, claiming that such a thorn as Haman should only be crucified on a thorn, and its offer was accepted.¹⁰⁰ This tradition is also found in several later *midrashic* compilations, but its late-antique origin is proven by its attestation in a Palestinian Jewish Aramaic poem embedded in the Targum Sheni to Esther, in its expansive retelling of Est. 7.10.¹⁰¹ There, each of the trees refuses to have Haman crucified upon it, and adduces scriptural or *halakhic* excuses for its inability to perform this task. Eventually, the cedar agrees to have Haman and his ten sons crucified upon it. This last source is particularly relevant for our own discussion, since the poem opens by saying ‘Hearken unto me (i.e., to Haman), trees, and all the plants / that have been planted since the day of creation, / for the son of Hammedata (i.e., Haman) is about to go up to the יLKS NRY’ of the son of Pandera’ (דבר המדתא בעי למסק לאלכסגריא)

⁹⁹ For the comparison between Haman and Jesus, see Thornton (1986); Horowitz (2006, esp. 223–25); Kattan Gribetz (2011, 170–76); McDowell (2021, 384–91).

¹⁰⁰ Esther R. 9.2.

¹⁰¹ See David (1898, 41); Ego (1996, 316–19); Grossfeld (1994, 66–67). This poem was re-edited by Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 182–87, no. 29), and cf. Lieber (2018, 99–102).

(דבר פנדירא).¹⁰² There have been many attempts to interpret the word 'LKSNNRY', which clearly is a Greek name (Alexandria?) or a Greek noun, but while its meaning remains elusive, the connection between the crucifixion of Haman and that of Jesus is quite clear.¹⁰³ Thus, it comes as no surprise when in the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu* one often finds a story of how Yeshu had adjured all the trees not to accept his body, so they all broke under his weight, until the Jews eventually realised that the solution is to crucify him on a cabbage stalk, which is not a tree, and therefore was not covered by the adjuration.¹⁰⁴ This version of the story clearly parallels the rabbinic stories about the crucifixion of Haman, and was no doubt inspired by them.

Returning to our own text, we may also note that the claim that a person could be crucified on a cabbage stalk seems slightly less improbable when we recall that some people in antiquity claimed that such stalks could be quite large. In one *tannaitic midrash* we read that 'Rabbi Shime'on ben Ḥalaphta said: "There was a stalk of cabbage in my house, and I would ascend and descend upon it, like ascending and descending on a ladder"'.¹⁰⁵ It is even

¹⁰² Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 182).

¹⁰³ See Grossfeld (1991, 180–81); Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 183); Kister (2007, 108, n. 9).

¹⁰⁴ For this story, see Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:91, 107, 120, 173–74, etc.).

¹⁰⁵ Sifre Deuteronomy 317: אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא: קלח של כרוב היה בתוך ביתי, והייתי עולה ויורד בו—בעולה ויורד בסולם. Cf. bt Ket 111b. As we shall note in our comments on 9.2, Rabbi Shime'on ben Ḥalaphta was active in the vicinity of Tiberias and displayed an interest in eschatological scenarios.

possible, but not very likely, that this image was in the mind of whoever chose the cabbage as the ‘tree’ on which to have Yeshu crucified, as a mockery of the claim that he ascended to Heaven, which will be mentioned in the following passage.¹⁰⁶

And yet, in spite of all the attempts to explain the motif of crucifixion on a cabbage stalk, there is no doubt that this is the strangest and least expected element in our narrative, and here I would like to suggest a completely different solution to this problem, one that assumes a small textual change. For if we assume that in an earlier version of the Aramaic text, Yeshu was not crucified על כנא דכרובא, ‘on a cabbage stalk’, but rather בגנא דכרובא, ‘in a cabbage garden’, then the text becomes much less puzzling. Thus, the earlier Aramaic text may have simply incorporated a well-known tradition, namely, that Jesus was crucified and buried in a garden—a tradition that is recorded already in the Gospel of John (as cited in our comments on 1.3). This tradition was also known to Tertullian, who was familiar with the claim that Jesus’ disciples secretly stole his body, so that he would seem to have resurrected, ‘or maybe it was the gardener who removed him, lest his lettuces be damaged by the crowd of visitors’ (*vel hortulanus detraxit, ne lactucae suae frequentia commeantium adlaederentur*).¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the claim that Jesus

¹⁰⁶ In late-antique Jewish texts, and especially in the Hekhalot literature, there is a well-worn metaphor of ascending to Heaven ‘as if on a ladder’, a metaphor that goes back to Jacob’s famous dream. See Rebigier (2003).

¹⁰⁷ See Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 30, with Horbury (1972, reprinted in Horbury 1998b, 176–79).

was crucified in a garden recurs, or is echoed in, many later sources as well.¹⁰⁸

The assumption that an earlier version of our text only spoke of crucifixion in a cabbage garden finds some indirect support in the writings of Agobard and Amulo. Agobard only says that the Jews relate how Jesus was ‘hung on the gallows’ (*furca suspensum*) and hit with a stone (see below, 8.2), and seems unaware of any story of crucifixion on a cabbage stalk. But Amulo states that the Jews claim that Jesus was ‘hung on a tree’ (*in ligno suspensum*), and that he was subsequently taken off the tree (see below, our comments on 8.3) and ‘thrown into a grave in some garden full of cabbages’ (*in quodam horto caulibus pleno in sepulcro proiectum*).¹⁰⁹ Amulo’s statement may reflect an older Christian tradition, such as Tertullian’s words that we have just quoted, but

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the claim in the *Acta Pilati* (Tischendorf 1853, 231) that Jesus was crucified in the garden in which he was caught (but cf. 262, for the claim that he was crucified at Golgotha), and the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle*, where Philogenes the gardener explains that he had buried Jesus in a tomb next to his vegetable garden (see Budge 1913, 188–89). And cf. the apocryphal gospel apparently cited by ‘Abd Al-Jabbār in 995 CE, in which a person who was wrongly identified as Jesus is said to have been crucified and buried in ‘a field of melons and vegetables’ (مبطخة ومبقلة), for which see Stern (1967, 44 and 55), and Pines (1968, 291–92); the claim made by Bammel (1968b), that al-Jabbār had access to a *Toledot Yeshu* text, seems to me unwarranted, and cf. Reynolds (2004, 233–36).

¹⁰⁹ See Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 25 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 48), with Newman (1999, 68–69) and Schäfer (2011, 33, 35, 45).

the fact that Amulo speaks of cabbages, rather than lettuces, argues for the influence of our text, especially as we already noted Amulo's familiarity with many motifs found in it. Thus, it seems quite likely that the text which Agobard and Amulo's informants read still had the older reading, גנג דכרובא, 'a cabbage garden', at this point, and said nothing about the type of tree on which Yeshu was crucified.

Accepting our reconstruction of an earlier version of this passage would also help explain one strange aspect of our text as it currently stands, namely, the fact that in the present passage we learn that Yeshu was crucified on a cabbage stalk, but in a subsequent passage (8.2) we learn that Yeshu was crucified alive and then stoned. Thus, we seem to have two different descriptions of the same crucifixion. However, if in the first instance the original reference was to *where* Yeshu was crucified, and the second was to *how* he was crucified, this inconsistency is greatly reduced.

The shift from גנג to כנא is easy to explain as a mere scribal error, but it may also have been a deliberate change, perhaps influenced by the rabbinic *midrashim* on the tree on which Haman and his ten sons were crucified. In either case, the fact that the new reading replaced the old one in the extant Aramaic texts and in most of the textual witnesses may be due to one additional factor, namely, the many Christian stories about Yehuda Kyriakos and the finding of the True Cross.¹¹⁰ For if Yeshu was crucified on a cabbage stalk, any Christian display of (fragments of) the

¹¹⁰ For these stories, see Drijvers and Drijvers (1997).

Cross on which Jesus was crucified is immediately proven false. We can thus imagine why this quirky change in the text became so popular among its many Jewish readers.

8.0. The Fate of Yeshu's Body

Having reported how both Yoḥanan and Yeshu were crucified, our narrative now moves to what is perhaps the most controversial part in all the stories about Jesus, namely, the Resurrection and the subsequent Ascension to Heaven. That this was a contested issue is evident already in the Gospel of Matthew, where we learn that after Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in his own new tomb, the chief priests and the Pharisees informed Pilate that Jesus had told his followers that after three days he would rise from the dead; they therefore asked Pilate to guard the tomb, lest Jesus' disciples steal his body and claim that he indeed came back to life. As a result, Pilate had the tomb sealed, and placed a guard over it (Matt. 27.62–66). Jesus subsequently rose from the dead, and the chief priests bribed the guards, who then told everyone that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body (Matt. 28.11–15). 'And', Matthew adds, 'this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day' (Καὶ διεφημίσθη ὁ λόγος οὗτος παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας) (Matt. 28.15). In a similar fashion, Justin Martyr claims that the Jews send men to every corner of the world to tell people that after Jesus was crucified 'his disciples stole his body from the tomb at night' (οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κλέψαντες αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ μνήματος νυκτός) and misled people by insisting that he rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven.¹ Both sources are not necessarily reliable when it comes to their depiction of Jewish anti-Christian polemics, but it stands to reason that some Jews

¹ Justin, *Dialogue* 108.2.

in late antiquity insisted that if the tomb of Jesus was found to be empty, it is only because his disciples had stolen his body.

Our narrative employs a different tactic, but its aim is the same: to prove that Yesu's body did not vanish, and that he never rose from the dead. This is an essential issue, for whereas Jesus' miracles could easily be acknowledged and explained as due to his mastery of magic (see above, 2.1), and his gathering of disciples and followers could be explained as a result of his miracles (see 2.3), the claim that he rose from the dead had to be refuted. For if it were true, then he surely was more than a mere magician who misled his people. Moreover, as we know from early Christian literature, from the New Testament onwards, the resurrection of Jesus was of paramount importance for the claim that he was the Messiah and the son of God.²

The attempt to refute the Christian claims about Jesus' resurrection played a part in the 'authentic' protocols of the trial of Jesus circulated in the time of Maximinus Daia. Rufinus, in a long insertion to his translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (9.6.3), cites a speech supposedly made by Lucian (who was martyred in 312), in which he says of Jesus:

Nor did he by his death deceive us to whom he rose after the third day, *not as those records of Pilate have it which are now being written in untruth (non ut ista, quae nunc falso conscribuntur, continent acta Pilati)*, but as innocent, blameless, and pure he accepted death for one reason only, that he might conquer it by rising again.³

² See, for example, 1 Cor. 15.12–23; Rom. 1.3–4, 4.24–25; 6.3–6.7, etc.

³ Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.* 9.6.3, translated by Amidon (2016, 354).

Unfortunately, Rufinus does not provide any further details on what these 'Acts of Pilate' actually said about the death and resurrection of Jesus, except to say that it was a lie.

The objection to the claims about the resurrection of Jesus is apparent in rabbinic literature as well. In a statement attributed to the fourth-century Rabbi Abbahu, he recasts Balaam's words in Num. 23.19 ('God is not a person, who lies, nor a son of man, who changes his mind; does he speak, and not act, or say (something), and not fulfil it?') as saying that 'If a man tells you 'I am a god'—he is lying; 'I am the son of man'—he will eventually regret it; 'that I ascend to Heaven'—he says (it), and will not fulfil it'.⁴ Here the claim—that if someone claims to be a god he is lying—may refer to various 'pagan' figures (including, for example, the Roman emperors), and not only to Jesus, but the conjunction of this claim with a claim that he was the 'son of man', and that he ascended to Heaven, clearly points to the Christian claims about Jesus. And Rabbi Abbahu, like our narrative, claims that this is simply a lie.⁵

⁴ See pt Ta'an 2.1 (65b), with Irshai (1982).

⁵ For R. Abbahu's frequent arguments with Christians, see Lachs (1970); Levine (1975, esp. 61); Halbertal and Naeh (2006).

8.1. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Before He Was Crucified, Yeshu Told His Followers That If They Do Not Find His Body, It Means That He Ascended to Heaven

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Ar1 But from before they raised him to the cross, he knew what [is writt]en in the Torah, “Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the cross.”⁶ At that moment he sent and called the pe[ople] whom he had misled and said to them: “If you come tomorrow and do not find me, nor my bo[dy], on the cross—I ascended to the firmament of Heaven, and you will not see me.”</p> | <p>וּמִן קָמִי דְּ<י>סְקוֹן יִתִּיָּה לְצִלְבָּא הוּוּ
יָדַע מִ' כְּתָ[יב] בְּאוֹרִיתָא לְ<א>תְּבִית
נְבִילְתִיָּה עַל צִלְבָּא בְּהֵיָּא שְׁעָתָא
שִׁלַּח וּקְרָא לְאִי[נְשִׁי] דְּאִטְעִי יִתְהוֹן
וְאִמ' לְהוֹן אִם [ת]זְלוֹן אֶתוֹן לְמַחַר
וְלֹא מִשְׁכַּחְתוֹן יִתִּי וְלֹא פִיג[רִי] עַל
צִלְבָּא סְלִיקִית אֲנָא לְרִקְעָא דְּשִׁמְיָא
וְלֹא תַחזוֹן יִתִּי.</p> |
| <p>Ar2 But from before they raised him, he knew what is written in the To[rah], “Do not let his [cor]pse remain overnight on the cross.” He sen[t and call]ed the people whom he had misled and said to [them: “If you come] tomorrow [and you will no]t find me, nor my body,</p> | <p>וּמִן קָמִי דִּי־סְקוֹנִיָּה הוּוּ י[ד]ע מֵאִי
דְּ[כ]תִיב בְּאוֹר[י]תָא לְ[א]תְּבִית
[נְבִי]לְתִיָּה עַל צִלְבָּא [א]שְׁלַח וּקְרָא
לְאִנְשֵׁי דְּאִטְעִינֵן וְאִמַר לְ[הוֹן] כִּד?
תִּיתוּ? לְ[זְלוֹן] לְמַחַר וְלֹא ת[שְׁכַחוּנִי
ו]לֹא פִגְרִי [עַל צִלְבָּא] הִבּוּ⁸ [י]דְעִין
דְּסִלְקִית לְרִקְעָא דְּשִׁמְיָא.</p> |

⁶ Deut. 21.23.

⁷ Or: ל[הוֹן אִין תְּזלוּ?].

⁸ The reading is very doubtful. Lege: הוּוּ.

[on the cross]—know that I
ascended to the firmament of
Heaven.”

- Ar4 “[...] if you do not find me, יתי לא לא⁹ משכחיתון
nor my body, on the cross—I ולא פיגרי על צליבא סל¹⁰ סלקית
ascended to the firmament of אנא לרקיעא דישמיא ולא תחזון¹¹
Heaven, and you will not see יתי.
me.”
- JA1 But before they crucified him, וקבל אן יצלבוה קד כאן יעלם אן פי
he had known that it is written אלתורה מכתוב לא תלין נבלתו על
in the Torah “Do not let his העץ פקאל לא {ק} צחאבה אן גיתם
corpse remain overnight on the גדא ולם תגדוני ההנא עלי אלצליב
tree,” and he said to his פאעלמו אני טלעת אלי אלסמא.
followers: “If you come
tomorrow and you will not find
me here on the cross—then
know that I ascended to
Heaven.”
- JA2 [...] “Do not let his corpse לא תבית גתתה עלי אלצלב.
remain overnight on the cross.”
- Heb1 But before they hung him, the וקדם שיתלוהו ידע הרשע כי יתפוש¹²
wicked one knew that he would ביד יש' ויצלבוהו כפי רשעתו ומצות
be caught by the hands of התורה היא ליש' שלא יניחוהו ללין
Israel (i.e., by the Jews), and בעץ שנ' לא תלין נבלתו וגו' וצוה
they would crucify him לתלמדיו ולאנשים שהתעה בדבריו
according to his wickedness, ואמ' להם אם תבואו מחר לא

⁹ A dittography?

¹⁰ These two letters were written as a line-filler, anticipating the first word in the next line.

¹¹ A reading תרִאון is also possible, but this would be a Hebrew verb in the midst of the Aramaic text.

¹² Lege: יתפיש or יתפס.

and (that) it is the law of the Torah for Israel that they should not let him spend the night on the tree, for it says “Do not let his corpse remain overnight,” etc. So he commanded his disciples, and the people whom he had misled with his words, and he said to them: “If you come tomorrow you will not find me on the tree, for during the night I shall ascend to Heaven,” etc.¹³ And they remembered his words.¹⁴

תמצאונ[י] על העץ כי אם בלילה
אעלה לשמים וכו' והיו דבריו בלבם.

Heb2 [He k]new that it is written for us, “Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the tree.” He said [... ... to the p]eople who believed in him: “If you come tomorrow and do not see [me nor] my body on the tree—know that I ascended to Heaven. And we

[י] דע כִּי כְּתוּב לָנוּ לֹא תֵלֵן נִבְלָתוֹ
עַל הָעֵץ. אָמַר [לֹא] נִשְׁיִם הֵיוּ
מֵאַמִּינִים בּוֹ אִם תִּבְּוֹאוּ לְמַחֲרָ וְלֹא
תִּרְאוּ [נִי וְלֹא] גּוֹפִי עַל הָעֵץ דְּעוּ כִי
עֲלִיתִי לִשְׁמַיָּא וְכֵן נֹדַע לָנוּ כִי כֹאשְׁרָ
תְּלוּ¹⁵ עַל הָעֵץ הוּא הִיָּה מִתְּעָה
בְּכַשְׁפִּים. וַיִּבְקֹשׁ מֵהֶם חֹמֶץ תְּקִיף
וַיִּשְׁתֶּה.

¹³ The addition of 'וכי', 'etc.' is quite surprising, as this is not a biblical verse, although the text may have Isa. 14.13 in mind: וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְךָ דָּבָר, 'And you said in your heart, I will ascend to Heaven, I will raise my throne above God's stars, and I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far reaches of the north'.

¹⁴ Lit., 'and his words were in their heart'.

¹⁵ The word אֹתוֹ, or the suffix -הוּ, were omitted from the text here.

also heard that when they hung
(him) on the tree, he was
misleading with magic, and he
asked them for powerful
vinegar and he drank (it).

Heb3 Yeshu'a the wicked said to
those who believed in him: "If
you come tomorrow and you
do not see me on the tree—
know that I ascended to
Heaven. And we also heard
that when they hung him, he
too (was?)¹⁶ misleading with
magic, and he asked them for
powerful vinegar and he drank
(it).

אמר ישוע הרשע למאמינים בו אם
תבואו למחר ולא תראו אתי על העץ
דעו כי עליתי לשמים וכן נודע לנו כי
כאשר תלו אותו אף הוא מתעה
בכשפים ויבקש מהם חמץ תקיף
וישתה.

Heb4 But before they raised him to
the cross [he k]new what is
written in the Torah, "Do not
let his corp[se remain
overni]ght on the tree." And at
that mom[ent] he sent and
called the people whom he had
misled, and said to them: "If
you come tomorrow you will
not find me, nor my body, on
the cross—you will surely

ומקודם שיעלוהו לצלוב [היה? י]ודע
מה כת¹⁷ בתורה לא ת[לין נ]בלתו על
על¹⁸ העץ ובש[עה] הִהיא שלח
ויקרא לאנשים שהתעם ואמר להם
א[ם] תבואו מחר לא תמצאוני ולא
פגרו¹⁹ על הצלוב ידוע תדעו שעליתי
לרקיע השמים ולא תראו או[ת]י.

¹⁶ The expression אף הוא makes little sense, and probably is corrupt.

¹⁷ I.e., כתוב, or כתיב.

¹⁸ Dittography between the end of one line and the beginning of the next one.

¹⁹ Lege: פגרי.

know²⁰ that I ascended to the firmament of Heaven, and you will not see me.”

Heb5 For it is written in the Torah, “Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the tree.” And before they hung him, he ordered his people, who went astray after him: “If you come tomorrow and do not find my body on the tree—I ascended to Heaven.”

²¹ דהא כת' בתורה לא תלין נבלתו
על העץ ומן קדם דתלין יתיה פקיד²²
לאנשיו שתעו אחריו אם תבואו
למחר ולא תמצאו את נבלתי על העץ
אל השמים עליתי.

All the textual witnesses agree in stating that Yeshu knew in advance that his body would be taken off the cross, in line with the biblical injunction of Deut. 21.23, and that he used this knowledge to trick his followers by telling them that if they do not find his body, it means that he ascended to Heaven. The texts of Ar1, Ar2, and Ar4, inasmuch as they are preserved, are very similar. Both Ar1 and Ar2 cite the biblical proof-text in Aramaic, rather than in Hebrew, and in the version that is attested in Targum Onqelos, which was the common Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible in late antiquity.²³ JA1 follows the Aramaic texts very

²⁰ The Hebrew text uses the very biblicalising form ידוע תדעו.

²¹ A few words were omitted from the text here; they are also missing in Heb6.

²² The last five words are in Aramaic, and might reflect a translation from that language, with these words left untranslated.

²³ See Targum Onqelos to Deut. 21.23 (Sperber 1959, 327). Deut. 21.23 is also cited in Aramaic, and in the same version, in Targum Sheni to Est. 9.24; see David (1898, 46) and Grossfeld (1994, 72).

closely, and is closer to Ar2 than to Ar1 and Ar4 in omitting the phrase 'and you will not see me'. JA1 refers to Yeshu's followers as his אֲצִחָא—rather than, 'the men whom he had misled', as in Ar1, Ar2, Heb4, and Heb5—reflecting the influence of Muslim terminology on the Arabic translator or redactor(s) of this text; this expression will recur in JA1 in 8.5, 8.7 and 8.10.²⁴ Of JA2, only the citation of Deut. 21.23 is preserved, but whereas in JA1 it is cited in Hebrew, here it is cited in Judaeo-Arabic in a version that is different from Saadiah Gaon's *Tafsir*; this is an issue to which we shall return in our comments on JA2 in 8.3, where the verse is cited more fully. Heb4 and Heb5 too are very close to the Aramaic texts, with Heb4 following Ar1 and Ar4 in including 'and you will not see me', and Heb5 following Ar2 in not including this part. Heb1, on the other hand, offers the same basic text as the Aramaic textual witnesses, but adds some minor flourishes, such as the claim that Yeshu knew he would be caught by the Jews and crucified according to his wickedness, and the claim that his disciples and followers kept his words in their hearts.²⁵ However, Heb2/Heb3 add a new element, which is unattested in

²⁴ For the frequent use of اصحاب to describe Jesus' disciples and followers, see, for example, Pines (1968, 250, 252, 253 and 261), and note that al-Jāhiz too refers to Jesus and his اصحاب (see above, our comments on 3.5).

²⁵ Interestingly, this is the only place in Heb1 where the root צלב appears. Throughout Heb1, it speaks of 'the tree' rather than 'the cross', and of 'hanging' rather than 'crucifixion'. Moreover, the reference to Jesus' 'disciples' (תלמידים) seems quite out of place here, since we already know that some of his disciples had escaped, and the others were executed (see above, 5.2–5.9).

any of the other textual witnesses, when they state that Yeshu was misleading people with his magic (as the narrative already made clear on several different occasions), and that to do so he asked for strong vinegar. This last detail is introduced by וכן נודע לנו כי, ‘And we also heard that’, which marks it as a later interpolation, added by the translator or redactor of this Hebrew version. It is based on the Gospel accounts, where we read that when Jesus cried ‘Eli, Eli’ (my God, my God), some people thought he was calling for Elijah, while others brought him vinegar (ὄξος), perhaps thinking that he called for חל—probably pronounced ‘el’—i.e., ‘vinegar’.²⁶ Given its appearance in the Gospels, it is not surprising to find Yeshu’s drinking of vinegar in the ‘Helena’ recension of *Toledot Yeshu*, which is where the interpolator of Heb2/Heb3 may have found it.²⁷ But in Heb2/Heb3, Yeshu’s request for vinegar, and his drinking thereof, is somehow connected with his magical activities, although the connection is not clear. Vinegar is quite a common ingredient in Jewish magical recipes, but it is usually combined with other ingredients, and is used for mundane aims such as making hair grow or stopping

²⁶ See Matt. 27.48 and Mark 15.36; in John 19.29, Jesus asks for something to drink, and is given vinegar (in fulfilment of Ps. 69.21). For the weakening of the gutturals in Galilean Aramaic, see Kutscher (1976, 67–96), and note that in the *Gospel of Peter*, Jesus says, ‘My power, O power, you have forsaken me’, i.e., taking the Greek Ἠλὶ as Aramaic חילי; see Hennecke and Schneemelcher (1963–1965, I:224).

²⁷ See, for example, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 712 (#20523), fol. 157r: ויצמא ישו ויאמר תנו לי מעט מים ויקחו חומץ חזק ויתנו לו לשתות, ‘and Yeshu was thirsty, and said “Give me some water.” And they took strong vinegar and gave him to drink’; cf. Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:230).

menstruation.²⁸ In one version of *Shimmush Tehillim*, 'The (Magical) Uses of the Psalms', a recipe 'to kill a Gentile enemy' (להמית לשונא גוי) involves taking strong vinegar (חומץ חזק), reciting Ps. 69 fifteen times over the vinegar, pouring it at the entrance to the dwelling of that enemy, and reciting a special prayer.²⁹ The translator or redactor of Heb2/Heb3 may have known that Jesus cited Ps. 22.2, but it is hard to see how they could connect it with the recipe of *Shimmush Tehillim*, if they knew it at all.

The claim that Yeshu foretold his own resurrection is also made by the Gospels (Matt. 16.21, 17.22–23, 20.18–19, etc.), but whereas the Gospels have him foretelling his death and resurrection long before his crucifixion, our text makes it clear that it was only *after* he was sentenced to crucifixion that Yeshu foretold his resurrection, and this on the basis of his knowledge of Deut. 21.23 and its implications. However, the connection between the death of Jesus and Deut. 21.23 goes back to earliest Christian history, as we may deduce from Paul's citation of this verse in Gal. 3.13, where he says that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Torah (ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου) by becoming a curse (κατάρα) for us, for it is written, "Cursed (ἐπικατάρατος) is everyone who is hung on a tree (ἐπὶ ξύλου)"". But whereas Paul used one part of Deut. 21.23, and built his exegesis on the verse's reference to the curse associated with the hung (or crucified) person, our text uses the very beginning of the verse, where the Jews

²⁸ See, for example, MS NYPL 190, page 184, ll. 5–6, and page 186, ll. 13–14, in Bohak (2014a, I:225 and 228; and II:184 and 186).

²⁹ See MS NYPL 190, page 229, ll. 6–17, in Bohak (2014a, I:263–64, and II:229), and Rebigier (2010, 57*).

are told not to leave the hung (or crucified) person on the tree on the night after he is executed.

8.2. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Yeshu is Crucified, and the Jews Want to Leave His Body on the Cross

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| Ar1 | They crucified him alive, and they stoned him with a stone, and he died on the cross. And they did not want to take him down from the cross. | וּצְלְבוּ יֵשׁוּ כִּד חַי וּרְגֻמוּ יֵשׁוּ בְּאַבְנָא
וּמִית עַל צְלִיבָא וְלֹא הָווּ צִבְן לֵאחַתָּא
יֵשׁוּ מִן צְלִיבָא. |
| Ar2 | They crucified him al[ive, and st]oned him with stones, and he died on the [cro]ss. And they did not want to take him down from the cross. | וּצְלְבוּ [ה] כִּד [חַי וּרְגֻמוּ] בְּאַבְנֵי
וּמִית עַל צְלִיבָא [וְלֹא] צִבּוּ
לֵאחַתָּא מִצְלִיבָא. |
| Ar4 | They crucified him alive, and stoned him with stones, and he died on the cross. And they did not want to take him down from the cross. | וּצְלְבוּ יֵשׁוּ כִּד חַי וּרְגֻמוּ יֵשׁוּ
בְּאַבְנֵי וּמִית עַל צְלִיבָא וְלֹא הָווּ
צִבְן לֵאחַתָּא יֵשׁוּ מִן צְלִיבָא. |
| JA1 | Then they crucified him alive, and stoned him with stones. And they did not want to take him down from the cross. | תָּם צְלְבוּהוּ בִּלְחֵיאָה וּרְגֻמוּהוּ
בִּלְחֵגָאָה וְלֹא יִרְדּוּ יַחְדָּרוּהוּ מִן עַלְיָ
אַלְצִיבָּ. |
| JA2 | They crucified him after they stoned him with stones until he died. And they did not want to bring him down from the cross. | וּצְלְבוּהוּ בְּעֵד אַן רְגֻמוּהוּ בִּלְחֵגָאָה
חֲתִי מֵאֵת וְלֹא יִרְדּוּ יַחְדָּרוּהוּ מִן עַלְיָ
אַלְצִל [י]. |
| Heb1 | They hung him on the tree, and they stoned him with stones, and he died on the tree. And | וַיְתִלוּ אוֹתוֹ עַל הָעֵץ וַיִּרְגְּמוּהוּ בְּאַבְנִים
וּמֵת עַל הָעֵץ וְהָעֵמִידוֹ עָלָיו גַּל אֲבָנִים
וְלֹא רָצוּ שִׁירִידוֹהוּ מִן הָעֵץ. |

they placed a mound of stones
over him. And they did not
want to take him down from
the tree.³⁰

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| Heb2 | They stoned him on the tree,
and he died on the tree. | וירגמוהו על העץ ויָמָת על העץ. |
| Heb3 | They stoned him on the tree. | וירגמוהו על העץ. |
| Heb4 | They crucified him alive, and
stoned him with stones, and he
died [on] the tree. And [they
did not want] to take him
down from the tree. | ויצלבו אותו ח[י] וירָגְמוּ אוֹתוֹ
בְּאֵ[ב] נִים וּמָת [על] העץ ולא [היו
רוצִי?] ³¹ לְהוֹרִידוֹ מִן הָעֵץ. |
| Heb5 | They hung him on the tree, and
stoned him with stones until he
died. And they did not want to
take him down from the tree. | ותלו אותו על העץ ורגמוהו באבנים
עד שמת ולא רצו להורידו מן העץ. |

The three Aramaic textual witnesses preserve the same basic text, with minor differences; the only significant difference between them is that Ar1 speaks of stoning with ‘a stone’, whereas Ar2 and Ar4 speak of ‘stones’. JA1 follows the Aramaic texts closely, but omits the claim that ‘he died on the cross’. JA2 does include that claim, but changes the order of actions: first stoning, and then crucifixion. Both Judaeo–Arabic texts speak of ‘stones’. Heb1 diverges somewhat from the Aramaic texts, by speaking of ‘the tree’ rather than ‘the cross’ (as it does throughout the text), and by making the very improbable claim that ‘they placed a mound of stones over him’. Heb2 abridges the text, and Heb3

³⁰ Lit., ‘they did not want that they will take him down from the tree’.

³¹ This reconstruction is only tentative. Another possibility is וּלֹא [רצ]י, but the lacuna is too large for a single word.

abridges it even further. Heb4 follows the Aramaic texts very closely, but translates ‘the cross’ as ‘the tree’ (and refers to ‘stones’), but Heb5 is slightly further removed from the Aramaic texts—it translates ‘the cross’ as ‘the tree’ and ‘crucified’ as ‘hung’, and omits the reference to ‘alive’.³² And it too refers to ‘stones’.

The claim that Yeshu was stoned with a single stone might be the result of a textual error, but is more likely to be based on those biblical verses that speak of stoning אבן (ב), which could be understood literally as ‘with a (single) stone’.³³ This suggestion is also supported by Agobard’s report of what the Jews read in their ancestral teachings. For he too says that Jesus was ‘hung on a gallows, where he was also struck on the head with a stone, and died in this manner’ (*furca suspensum, ubi et petra in capite percussum atque hoc modo occisum*).³⁴ The fact that he used the word *petra* (ultimately derived from Greek, πέτρα) in the singular may reflect the reading that his Jewish informants had in front of them.³⁵ And al-Jāhīz says that the Jews claim that Jesus ‘was killed and stoned’ (مقتولا مرجوما)—i.e., first killed, and then stoned—but says nothing about the number of stones used in the act of stoning.

Contrary to 7.8, where we were told that Yeshu was crucified, or hung, on a cabbage stalk, in this passage we learn that he

³² For the semantic overlaps between ‘cross’ and ‘tree’ in antiquity, see also Thornton (1972).

³³ See Lev. 20.2, 27; 24.23; Josh. 7.25, etc. But note the use of the plural, אבנים, in Num. 14.10; 15.35–36; Deut. 21.21, etc. And cf. the text of Heb1 in 5.7 and of Heb2/Heb3 in 5.8: ורגמוהו באבן.

³⁴ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206).

³⁵ As was duly noted by Schäfer (2011, 35).

was crucified—presumably on a wooden cross (as assumed by Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, and Heb5)—but without mention of a specific type of wood. Moreover, whereas Yoḥanan was merely crucified (see above, 7.1), Yeshu was first crucified and subsequently stoned. The Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus make no mention of stoning, since the execution they depict is a Roman crucifixion, whose premise was that the crucified person would suffer a slow, painful death. And as we already noted in our comments on 3.6, although *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* insists that it was the Jews who killed Yeshu, the legal grounds for doing so seem to be based on Roman—and not on Jewish—assumptions. Thus, the present scene conflates two different modes of execution. In rabbinic *halakha*, crucifixion, or hanging, are not one of the four standard methods of execution, which (as we noted above, in our comments on 5.4) include stoning, burning, killing (i.e., beheading) and strangling. But according to Rabbi Eliezer, ‘All those who are stoned are also hung’, and according to the majority view ‘only one who curses God, or worships idols, is hung’ (m San 6.4). Thus, the connection between stoning and crucifixion may be based on *halakhic* assumptions, though not necessarily those of the rabbis. For had our narrative wanted to follow rabbinic *halakha*, we would have expected Yeshu to be stoned, in line with the rabbinic injunction that magicians are to be stoned (m San 7.4), and only then hung. Thus, the claim that Yeshu was first crucified and then stoned may be an attempt to show that he was punished *both* according to the Roman mode of execution *and* according to the Jewish one. This would also explain why JA2 changed the

order of the actions, and had Yeshu first stoned and then crucified, in order to follow rabbinic *halakha*.

8.3. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah Insists That Yeshu's Body Should Be Taken Down From the Cross

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb4, Heb5 (this passage is omitted in Heb2/Heb3)

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| Ar1 | <p>R. Yehoshu'a said to them:
 "Because of Yeshu the wicked
 we shall change the law of the
 Torah? For it is written, 'Do not
 let his corpse remain overnight
 on the cross', etc.³⁶."</p> | <p>אמ' להו ר' יהושע בדיל יישו רשיעא
 נשני אנחנא קיימא דאוריתא דכתיב
 לא תבית נבילתיה על צליבא וג'.</p> |
| Ar2 | <p>[Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben]
 Peraḥiah said to them: "Because
 of Yeshu the wicked we shall
 change the law of the Torah?
 For it is written, 'Do not let his
 corpse remain overnight on the
 cross'." Rabbi Yehosh[u'a ben]
 Peraḥiah said to them: "Bring
 him down from the cross."</p> | <p>אמר ליהוון [רבי יהושע בן] פרחיה
 בדיל ישו רשיעא נשני קימא
 דאוריתא דכתיב לא תבית נבילתיה על
 צליבא אמר להון רבי יהושע [ע בן]
 פרחיה אחתוניה מצליבא.</p> |
| Ar4 | <p>R. Yehoshu'a said to them:
 ["Because of Yeshu the wick]ed
 we shall change the law of the
 Torah? [For it is written, 'Do
 not let his corpse remain</p> | <p>אמ' להון <ר' יהוש' [בדיל יישו
 רשיע]א אנחנא נשני קיאמא
 דאוריתא [דכתיב לא תבית נבילתיה]
 ע' צליבא וגו' אמ' ר' יהושע ... א³⁷
 [יתי]ה מן צליבא</p> |

³⁶ Deut. 21.23.

³⁷ Lege: אַחַת. In Ar4's script, the combination of a waw and a final *nun* resembles an *aleph*, and cf. below, our comments on Ar4 in 8.6 and 8.11.

- overnight] on the cross', etc.”
- R. [Yehoshu'a] said: [“Bring him down] from the cross.”
- JA1 Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah said to them: “Because of the cursed Yeshu we shall change what is (written) in the Torah?”
- JA2 R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah said to them: “Because of Yeshu the heretic we shall change what is written in the Torah, ‘Do not let his c[orpse] remain overnight on the cross, but bury him on that day’?”
- Heb1 In the evening, R. Yehoshu'a said to t[hem]: “On account of Yeshu the wicked who [] the Name we shall not erase what is written in the Torah, ‘Do not let (his corpse) remain overnight’, etc.”
- Heb4 [They said] to R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah: “Because of Yeshu [the wi]cked we shall change the law of the Torah, in which it says, ‘Do not let his cor[pse r]emain overnight on the tree’?”
- פקאל להם יהושוע בן פר<חיה>
בסבב ישו אללעין נגיר מא פי
אלתורה.
- קאל להם ר' יהושע בן פרחיה בסבב
ישו אלפאסֶק נגיר אלדִי מִכְתּוּב פי
אלתוריה³⁸ לא תבית גִּ [תתה] עלי
אֶל[צ] ליב בל אדפנוה. פי דלך
אליים.³⁹
- בערב אמ[ר] [ל]הם ר' יהוש' בשביל
ישו הרשע ש[] א[ת] השם לא
נמחוק מה שכת' בתורה לא תלין וגו'.
- [ויאמר?] ו לר' יהושע בן פרחיה
בעבור יישו [הר]שע נחליף אנחנו
חוק התורה שכת' בה לא תלין
נב[לתו על העץ].

³⁸ Lege: אלתורה or אלתורה.

³⁹ The last three words are still a part of the Judaeo-Arabic version of Deut. 21.23, but the copyist of JA2 probably understood them as the beginning of the next sentence, since he wrote a full stop, and left a larger space, after אדפנוה.

Heb5 R. Yehoshu'a said to them: "Because of this wicked (person) we shall transgress His commandments and laws? For it is written in the Torah, 'Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the tree'."	אמ' להם ר' יהושע בשביל רשע זה נעבור על מצותיו וחקותיו דכת' בתורה לא תלין נבלתו על העץ. .
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In this case, we can see how Ar2 and Ar4 have R. Yehoshu'a's rhetorical question followed by his injunction to take Yeshu off the cross in line with the biblical legislation, but Ar1 has only the question, without the injunction. Other than this, there are only minor differences between the three Aramaic textual witnesses, and especially the difference between Ar1's אנהנא, Ar4's נשני, and Ar2's נשני. Both JA1 and JA2 follow Ar1 in omitting Yehoshu'a's injunction, but JA2 adds a citation of Deut. 21.23, which is longer than what JA2 included in 8.1, and is as long as, but slightly different from, JA2's rendition of the verse in 8.7 (where the word used for 'corpse' is נבילה, rather than ג'ת'ה). Both Judaeo-Arabic renditions of the verse clearly differ from Saadiah's *Tafsir*, which reads ולא תבת ג'ת'תה עליהא בל אדפנה, 'and do not let his corpse remain overnight on it (f.)',⁴⁰ but bury it a burying⁴¹ on that day'. The translator behind JA2 may have relied on a translation that is different from Saadiah's, but he probably translated the verse himself, each time

⁴⁰ I.e., on 'the tree' (כ'שבה) which is found in the previous verse.

⁴¹ My non-idiomatic translation aims to reflect Saadiah's attempt to reflect the biblical Hebrew form קבור תקברנו in his Arabic translation.

slightly differently.⁴² In either case, his translation displays some of the markings of the early Judaeo-Arabic translations of the Torah, characterised by their phonetic spelling.⁴³ It is therefore possible that JA2 reflects a relatively early translation of the Aramaic text, which was partly 'normalised' in the course of its transmission.

All three Hebrew versions follow Ar1 in omitting Yehoshu'a's injunction, but Heb1 adds some details, including the claim that Yehoshu'a said what he said 'in the evening', and that he mentioned Yeshu's blasphemies. Interestingly, each version uses a different verb to translate the Aramaic verb שני. Of these verbs, Heb4's נחליף is quite unexpected, and might be due to a translation from, or the influence of, Arabic, where غَيَّرَ means both 'change' and 'exchange' or 'replace'.

The claim that Yeshu's body was taken off the cross by evening was well-known to the author of the *piyyut*, 'Those who support a *mamzer* as an idol', which we already referred to in our comments on 3.1 and 3.8. There, the followers of the *mamzer* are also described as 'those who turn to the one who was hung until

⁴² For Saadiah's translation of Deut. 21.23, see Derenbourg et al. (1893–1899, I:285). For pre-Saadian translations of the Hebrew Bible, see Blau and Hopkins (2017); unfortunately, Deut. 21.23 is not preserved in the extant fragments of these translations.

⁴³ Typical characteristics of the phonetic spelling are the inconsistency in the spelling of short and long vowels (צלב in 8.1, צליב in 8.3 and 8.7), and the phonetic spelling of אדפנוה (rather than אדפנה, which is the 'standard' form, and is indeed found in 8.7). But in the purely phonetic spelling, one would not expect the spelling אל before sun-letters, but would rather expect אצליב.

the evening' (הפונים לנתלה עדי נשף), with a clear reference to taking Jesus off the cross by evening.⁴⁴ However, this claim need not reflect a familiarity with our text, as the injunction of Deut. 21.23 could have given rise to this motif even without recourse to our text. But some version of this and the next passage clearly was known to Amulo, who embarked on a long discussion of Deut. 21.23, and claimed that the Jews use it to blaspheme against Christ; this included their nasty claim that, like the brigands in Amulo's own days, he was punished by being hung on the cross (*in crucis ligno... more latronum, qui nunc suspenduntur, infamant esse punitum*), rather than being nailed to it. And, Amulo adds,

When their master Joshua cried out and ordered them (*et conclamante ac iubente magistro eorum Iosue*), he (Jesus) was quickly taken off the cross and thrown into a grave in some garden full of cabbages, lest their land be polluted (*ne terra eorum contaminaretur*).⁴⁵

The end of the sentence points back to Deut. 21.23, and although this part of the verse is not cited in any of our direct textual witnesses, it is definitely implied by them, whereas the claim that the Jews buried Jesus at the command of their master (or teacher) Joshua surely points to Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah's role in our passage.

⁴⁴ See Zulay (1938, 382), and Rand (2013, 15).

⁴⁵ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 25 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 48); for the garden full of cabbages, see above, our comments on 7.8.

8.4. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Yeshu is Buried in Yehudah's Garden

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Ar1	They brought him down from the cross and buried him in the water-channel in the garden of R. Yehudah the gardener.	אחתוה מן צליבא וקברוהי ברהטא דמיא בגינתא דר' יהודה גננא.
Ar2	They brought him down and buried him [in the] water-[channel] of the garden of R. Yehudah the gardener.	ואחתוניה וקברוהי [ברהטא] דמיא דגינתא דרבי יהודה גננא.
Ar4	They buried him in the [water]-channel [in the gar]den of R. Yehudah the gardener.	וקברוהי ברהטא [דמיא בגי]נתא ⁴⁶ דר' יהודה גננא.
JA1	They brought him down and buri[ed him] in the water-trough in the garden of Yehudah the gardener.	פאחצרוה ⁴⁷ וא[ל]דפנ[וה] ענד' חוץ אלמא פי אלגנאן אלדי ליהודה אלגנאן.
JA2	He ⁴⁸ (i.e., Yehoshu'a) brought [him down from the cr]oss and buried him in a trough for	אֲנִי[ל]ה ⁴⁹ מן אלצ[ל]י[ב] ודפנה פי חוץ' כאן ל[מ]י[א] פי בסתאן יהודה אל ⁵⁰ ב[ס]תנבאני.

⁴⁶ Or: דגי[נתא].

⁴⁷ I.e., פאחצרוה. For JA1's confusion between *ص*, *ض*, and *د*, see also our comments on 6.11.

⁴⁸ As noted in our comments on 8.3, the copyists of JA2 probably thought that this sentence begins earlier, and reads 'On that day, he (i.e., Yehoshu'a) brought him down', etc.

⁴⁹ Or: ונ[ל]ה⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ The scribe wrote the definite article at the end of the line, and the word itself in the next line.

- [wat]er in the garden of
Yehudah the orchard-man.
- Heb1 his words, the whole world.⁵¹ דבריו כל העולם⁵² והורידהו מן העץ
וקברוהו בתעלת מים בגן יהודה.
And he (or, they) brought him
down from the tree, and they
buried him in a water-channel
in the garden of Yehudah.
- Heb2 They brought him down and ויורידוהו ויקברוהו תחת צנור המים
buried him under the water- בתוך פרדס יהודה הפרדסי.
pipe inside the orchard of
Yehudah the orchard-man.
- Heb3 They brought him down and ויורידוהו ויקברוהו תחת [] מור⁵⁴
buried him under a deep water- מים עמוק בתוך פרדס יהודה
[] inside the orchard⁵³ of הפרדסי.
Yehudah the orchard-man.
- Heb4 They brought him down and ויורידוהו ויקברו[הו בר] הט המים
buried [him in] the water- שלרבי יהושע⁵⁵ ג[ננה?]
chan[nel] of Rabbi Yehoshu'a
(!) the g[ardener].

⁵¹ Either these words are misplaced here, or a few words were omitted from the text, and see the following note.

⁵² The last three words are meaningless here; it is possible that one or more words were omitted from the text, e.g., 'and the whole world heard (or, obeyed) his words', but elsewhere in Heb1 the references to 'the world' are to Yeshu's misleading of 'the world', in which case these words belong elsewhere in the text.

⁵³ Or: 'under a water-[] deep inside the orchard'.

⁵⁴ One would expect the word *צינור*, as in Heb2, but the reading of the *mem* is quite certain.

⁵⁵ One would expect Yehudah, but cf. below, 8.6, where Heb4 again refers to R. Yehoshu'a.

Heb5 Therefore they brought him down from the tree and buried him in the water troughs. And the rain came at night and the water carried Yeshu's body and brought it to the place of Yehudah the gardener—who was an owner of cucumbers— and the body of Yeshu the wicked sat in Yehudah's garden.	לפיכך הורידוהו מן העץ וקברוהו בשיקות המים ובא הגשם בלילה וסחב המים נבלתו של ישו והוליכה למקום יהודה גננא והוא בעל קשואים וישבה נבלת ישו הרשע בגנתו שליהודה.
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The three Aramaic textual witnesses are almost identical, except that Ar2 omits the words 'from the cross' and Ar4 omits the initial action, 'they brought him down' (from the cross). Interestingly, Ar1, Ar4, and presumably Ar2 as well, use the word *רהט*, which is well attested in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 30.38, 41; Exod. 2.16), is occasionally found in the Aramaic Targumim, and is attested in Syriac and Mandaic.⁵⁶ In 8.11 the Aramaic textual witnesses will use a different term, *בית שקיא דמיא*, as will be noted below. It is not entirely clear whether the Aramaic text referred to a canal, which is how Heb1 and Heb2 (and probably Heb3 as well) understood this term, or to a closed water-trough, which is implied by JA1 and JA2.

JA1 follows Ar1 and Ar2 closely, but JA2 turns the plural verbs to singular, thus claiming that it was Yehoshu'a himself who brought Yeshu down from the cross and buried him. Heb1's text suffers from some textual corruption, but Heb2/Heb3 and

⁵⁶ See Sokoloff (2009, 1441).

Heb4 follow the Aramaic texts quite closely, with Heb4 preserving the Aramaic word רהט in his Hebrew text, and with Heb3 adding that the burial was ‘deep’. But whereas Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, Heb4, and Heb5 refer to Yehudah’s ‘garden’ and refer to him as ‘the gardener’, JA2 and Heb2/Heb3 refers to his ‘orchard’ (בסתאן in JA2 and פרדס in Heb2/Heb3) and refer to him as an ‘orchard-man’ (ב[ס]תנבאני in JA2 and פרדסי in Heb2/Heb3).⁵⁷ This may point to JA2 being translated from a Hebrew text, or to Heb2/Heb3 being translated from a text in Judaeo–Arabic, but it is also possible that both were translated from Aramaic texts where the word בוסתן was used, even though this Middle Persian loanword is quite rare in the Aramaic texts of late antiquity.⁵⁸

In contrast with all the other textual witnesses, but in line with its penchant for expansions and interpolations, Heb5 adds a detailed description of how after it was buried, Yeshu’s body was carried away during the night by rain-water, and landed in the garden of Yehudah, who is described not as a mere gardener, but as an owner of cucumbers, which will re-appear in Heb5’s account in 8.6.

The claim that Jesus was buried in a water-channel, or a trough, seems to have had long roots. The third-century Christian poet Commodian, who displays some familiarity with post-biblical Jewish texts and traditions, says that the Jews ‘defame (Jesus)

⁵⁷ In Arabic, one would expect the word بُسْتَانِي, i.e., ב(ו)סתאני; the spelling ב[ס]תנבאני probably reflects the influence of Persian (see Lane 1863–1893, I:202), and is attested in Mandaic, but not in the other Aramaic dialects; see Drower and Macuch (1963, 56).

⁵⁸ For Aramaic בוסתנא, see Sokoloff (2020, 128).

even more (by saying): “We threw him into a well (or, a pit)” (*Sed magis infamant: In puteum misimus illum*).⁵⁹ A similar claim is attested in a text now known as the *Lament of the Virgin*, or the *Gospel of Gamaliel*, where the Jews insist that the body of Jesus is found in a deep well (see below, in our comments on 8.10). And Agobard, in his report of what the Jews relate about Jesus, says that after Jesus was killed, ‘he was buried next to some aqueduct and handed over to someone called Iuda, to guard him’ (*iuxta quemdam aquaeductum sepultum, et Iudae cuidam ad custodiam commendatum*).⁶⁰ This is a short but quite accurate summary of our passage. But Agobard also adds that,

In the night he was carried away by a sudden inundation of the aqueduct (*noctu uero subita aquaeductus inundatione sublatus*); he was sought after for twelve months, by Pilate’s order, but was still not found (*Pilati iussu per duodecim lunas quaesitum, nec usque inuentum*).⁶¹

This sounds quite like Heb5’s description of the fate of Yeshu’s body, and might demonstrate the antiquity of the claim that it was carried away by the water, but the rest of Agobard’s narrative does not parallel any of our textual witnesses, as we noted above, in section II.2.4 of the Introduction.

⁵⁹ Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum* (or, *Carmen de duobus populis*) 436, and cf. 439 and 473. And cf. our comments on 8.12, below.

⁶⁰ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206); Schäfer (2011, 33 and 35), translates *Iudae cuidam* as ‘some Jew’, but it seems clear that Agobard refers to Yehudah (the gardener), about whom he had never heard before.

⁶¹ Agobard, *De Iud. super.* 10 (van Acker 1981, 206–7).

It is quite possible, but far from certain, that the earliest narrators of our story had a specific place in mind when they spoke of a water-channel that runs through Yehudah’s garden. In spite of its location on the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias also benefitted from a long aqueduct that brought water from a spring some 11 kilometres to the south.⁶² However, like the water-holes (?) where Yeshu will find his final resting place (in 8.12), this location too is never mentioned by any other source.

8.5. The Fate of Yeshu’s Body: Yeshu’s Followers Do Not Find His Body and Insist That He Ascended to Heaven and That The Jews Are Lying

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

Ar1	When these people whom he had misled came, and did not find him on the cross, they surrounded and caught the Jews and said to them: “Yeshu our master told us the truth, that the Jews are dealing with a lie. If you crucified him on the cross, where is his body? In truth, he went to Heaven.”	ובכיון דאתו הנך אינשי דאטעי יתהון ולא אשכחוהי על צליבא אחדרו ⁶³ ותפשו יתהון ליהודאי ואמרו להון קושטא אמ' לנא יישו מרנא די יהודאי בשיקרא עסיקין אם על צליבא צלבתון יתיה פי[ג]ריה היכן הוא בקושטא דאזל לשמיא.
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⁶² See Winogradov (2002).

⁶³ The spelling of this verb with a *he* (as in Ar4) is more common, but the spelling with *het* is well attested; see Sokoloff (2020, 310). Interestingly, this verb, which is typical of JBA (JPA prefers the verb חזר), is found in Ar1 and Ar4, but not in Ar2.

- Ar2 When [these people ca]me, and did not find him on the cross, they said: ["Yeshu] our master [told us] the truth, (that) the Jews are dealing with a lie. If [he was crucified]⁶⁴ on the cross, where did his body go? In truth, he ascended to Heaven."
- Ar4 When these [peop]le whom he had misled came, they did not find him on the cross; they surrounded and caught [the Jews and] said to them: "Yeshu our master told us the truth, (that) the Jews are dealing with a lie. If you crucified him on the cross, where did his body go? In [truth], he ascended to Heaven."
- JA1 When his followers came to him, and did not find him on the cross, they calumniated and said that "He ascended to Heaven and his words that he said are true and your words are false."
- וכיין דא[תו הנך אנשי] ולא
אשכחניה על צליבא אמ[ר]ו קושטא
א[מר לן ישו] מרנא יהודאי בשקרא
עסיקין אם על צליב[א אצטלב⁶⁵]
פגריה להיכן אזל בקושטא לשמיא
סלק.
- וכיון דאתו הנך [אינ]שי דאטעי יתהון
לא אשכחו יתיה על צליבא אהדרו
ותפסו [ית?]הון ליהודאי? ו[אמרו]
להון קושטא אמ' לנא יישו מרנא
יהודאי בשיקרא עסיקין אם על צליבא
צליבתון יתיה פגריה להיכן אזל ב'⁶⁶
[בקושטא] לשמיא סליק.
- פלמא גאווה אצחאבה ולם יגדוה עלי
אלצליב שנעו וקאלו אנה טלע אלי
אלסמא ואן קולה אלדי קאל חק
וקולכם באטל.

⁶⁴ Or: 'If [you crucified him]'.

⁶⁵ Or: צלבתוניה.

⁶⁶ A line-filler, consisting of the first letter of the first word of the next line.

- JA2 When it was morning, those people whom Jesus had misled came and did not find him on the cross; they clung to the Jews and said to them: “The truth that Yeshu our master said to us, that the Jews believe a lie. If you had indeed crucified him, his body—where is it? In truth, he ascended to Heaven.”
- Heb1 In the morning, the people whom he had misled came, and did not find him on the tree. They said: “Yeshu told us the truth—that he is the son of God, and he ascended to Heaven. If you hung him, where is his body? In truth, he really ascended to Heaven.”
- Heb2 In the morning of the Sunday, the people whom Yeshu‘a the wicked had misled gathered together, and caught the Jews, and said to them: “In truth Yeshu‘a told us that the Jews are dealing with a lie;⁶⁷ where
- ולמא כּאֵן בּאלגדאה גּאֵן אולאִיך
אלנאס אלדי אט'להם⁶⁷ ולם יג'דונה
עלי אלצל[י]ב תעלקו בּאליהוד וקאלו
להם אלחק אלדי קאל לנא ישו סִידנָא
אן אליהוד מעתקדין אלכדב אן
כ>נ>תם קד צלב[ת] מוּוה גתתה אין
הי מן חקא אנה צעד אלי אלסמא.
- בבקר באו האנשים שהתעם ולא
מצאוהו על העץ אמרו אמת אמר לנו
ישו כי הוא בן אלוה ועלה לשמים אם
הִתְלַתֵּם אוֹתוֹ {ב} אנה נבלתו ודאי
באמת {ב} בשמים עלה.
- ובבקר ביום אחד בשבת נק>ב>צו
בני האדם א{נ}>ש>ר{ם}⁶⁹ התעה
אותם ישוע {ה} הרשע ויתפשו את
היהודים. ויאמרו להם באמת סִפֵּר לנו
ישוע [כ]י היהודים בשקר עסיקים.
איה האיש אשר תליתם באמת
לשמים עלה.

⁶⁷ I.e., أضلهم, and cf. JA2's text in 6.2 and 8.5.

⁶⁸ The Hebrew text is a bit awkward here, as it is based on a mechanical translation of the Aramaic.

⁶⁹ The scribe seems to have written אנשים, 'people', but realised that he already written בני האדם, and corrected it to אשר, 'whom'.

is the man whom you hung? In truth, he ascended to Heaven.”

Heb3 In the morning of the Sunday, the [peo]ple whom Yoḥanan and Yeshu‘a had misled [], and caught the Jews, ... “... dealing with a lie; who ... ”

ובבקר בחדבשבה [] בְּנִי
הָאָ[דם] אֲשֶׁר הִתְעָה אֶתְּכֶם יוֹחָנָן וְיֵשׁוּ
וַיִּתְּפְסוּ אֶת הַיְּהוּדִים ⁷⁰ בַּשָּׁקֶר
עֲשׂוּקִים ⁷¹ מִי... ⁷²

Heb4 On the next day the people who were misled came, and did not find him on the tree. They hurried and caught the Jews, and said to them: “Yeshu our master told us the truth, that the Jews are dealing with a lie; if you hung him on the tree—where is his body? In truth, he ascended to Heaven.” They went [and told? Pila]tus the governor.

לְמַחֲרָת בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הַתּוֹעִים וְלֹא
מָצְאוּ אוֹתוֹ עַל הָעֵץ מִיֵּהָרָו וַתִּפְשׂוּם
לַיהוּדִים וַאֲמָרוּ לֵהֶם אִמָּת לֵאמֹר לָנוּ
יֵשׁוּ מֵרֵנָא כִּי הַיְּהוּדִים בַּשָּׁקֶר עוֹסְקִים
אִם עַל הָעֵץ תְּלִיתָם אוֹתוֹ נִבְלַתוּ אֵין
הִיא בְּ[א]מַת עַל[ה] לְשִׁמִּים הֲלָכּוּ
[וַאֲמָרוּ? לְפִיל]טוֹס הֶהָגְמוֹן.

Heb5 When people—the fools who were misled by him—came in the morning, they looked for him and did not find him. Immediately they went up to the king and said to him: “He (i.e., Yeshu) already commanded us, ‘If you do not find my body in the morning—

וְכַאֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ בְּבֹקֶר אֲנָשִׁים הַשּׁוֹטִים
שִׁתְּעוּ אַחֲרָיו בִּקְשׂוּהוּ וְלֹא מָצְאוּ אוֹתוֹ
מִיד עָלוּ לְמֶלֶךְ וַאֲמָרוּ לוֹ כִּבְר צוּה
עֲלֵינוּ אִם לֹא תִמְצָאוּ נִבְלַתִּי בְּבֹקֶר
דַּעוּ כִּי עֲלִיתִי לְשִׁמִּים וְלֹא מָצִינוּ
נִבְלַתוֹ בִּקְבָרוֹ לְהִיכֵן הַלֵּךְ.

⁷⁰ Some words were omitted from the text here, due to a parablepsis from the first היהודים to the second one.

⁷¹ Lege: עֲשׂוּקִים.

⁷² The text is garbled, due to a parablepsis from one האיש אשר תליתם אתו to the next.

know that I ascended to
 Heaven'. And we did not find
 his body in his tomb; where did
 he go?"

The three Aramaic textual witnesses display some dialectical differences, but only minor differences of content: Ar1 and Ar4 describe Yeshu's followers as 'those whom he had misled', but Ar2 does not include this phrase; Ar1 has them ask 'Where is his body', whereas Ar2 and Ar4 have them ask 'where did his body go'; Ar1 refers to 'going to Heaven', but Ar2 and Ar4 speak of 'ascending to Heaven'. More importantly, Ar1 and Ar4 have these followers surrounding and catching the Jews and telling them that they are liars, whereas in Ar2 they only say that the Jews are liars, and are not even saying this to the Jews themselves. In this case, it seems likely that Ar2 presents an earlier stage in the textual development of this passage, especially since in the next passage it is Pilatus who takes the initiative. From a historical perspective, one can imagine that the change in Ar1 and Ar4 was partly due to the growing power of Christians over Jews in the period when Byzantine Palestine was becoming more and more Christian.

One noteworthy element in the Aramaic text is the expression יֵשׁוּ מֵרְנָא, 'Yeshu our master', that is found in all three Aramaic texts, is preserved in its Aramaic form in Heb4, and is reflected in JA2's יֵשׁוּ סִידְנָא. This expression clearly echoes the frequent Christian references to Jesus as 'our Lord', or 'our master', which is widely attested in Syriac and in Christian Palestinian

Aramaic, and is reflected already in the early Christian exclamation *μαρὰν ἄθᾶ*, 'our master/Lord, come/has come'.⁷³ Apparently, the expression יֵשׁוּ מְרַנָּא was a common expression in the late-antique world in which *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* was first written.

JA1 looks more like a paraphrase of the Aramaic texts than a word-for-word translation, and it includes terms that are typical of the Muslim world, including the word אֶצְחָאב (for which see above, 8.1) and the contrast between חָק and בֹּאטֵל.⁷⁴ JA2, in contrast, remains quite close to the Aramaic texts, and especially to Ar1 and Ar4, since it includes the reference to 'those whom he misled' and to 'surrounding the Jews'; it follows Ar1 in asking 'Where is his body', but follows Ar2 and Ar4 in having Yeshu's followers state that he 'ascended to Heaven'. And it also claims that this part of the narrative occurred 'in the morning', an element which is not found in the extant Aramaic textual witnesses. This claim is also found in all the Hebrew textual witnesses, with Heb4 stating that it occurred 'on the next day' rather than 'in the morning'. But there are also many differences between the Hebrew versions. Heb1 has Yeshu's followers claim that he is the son of God, a claim that is not found at this place in any of the other textual witnesses, and clearly reflects an addition to Heb1, in line with similar additions in 0.13 and 2.3, and cf. 6.5.

⁷³ See 1 Cor. 16.22 and *Didache* 10.6. For the frequent use of מְרִי and מְרָן for Jesus in the Christian Aramaic dialects see Sokoloff (2014, 246) and Sokoloff (2009, 823).

⁷⁴ For the frequent opposition between باطل and حق, see Qur'an 2.42; 3.71; 8.8; 13.17; 17.81; 18.56; 21.18; 22.62; 31.30; 34.49; 40.5; 42.24 and 47.3.

Heb2/Heb3 claim that all this occurred on a Sunday, a claim that must be a later addition to the original text, based on the Christian claims that Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday after Passover, except that Heb3 uses the Aramaic word for ‘Sunday’, and thus may preserve an early element in the text. Moreover both Heb2/Heb3 and Heb4 translate the Aramaic expression בשיקרא עסיקין, in ways that show a direct dependence on an Aramaic text; Heb4 partly follows Ar1 and Ar4 in referring to Yeshu’s followers as התועים, and in retaining the phrase אחדרו ותפשו, except that he probably did not fully understand the first verb, and translated it as ‘they hurried’.⁷⁵ Like JA2, it too follows Ar1 in asking ‘Where is his body?’, but follows Ar2 and Ar4 in having Yeshu’s followers state that he ‘ascended to Heaven’. However, at the end of the passage, it adds that Yeshu’s followers ‘went to Pilatus the governor’, a statement that is not found in any of the Aramaic or Judaeo–Arabic textual witnesses, and finds only a partial parallel in Heb5’s claim that ‘they went up to the king’. Heb5 offers a paraphrase of the text, rather than a close parallel to any of the other textual witnesses.

As noted in our introduction to 8.0, the claim that the Jews are lying about Jesus’ body goes back to the Gospels themselves, but there the claim is that the Jews insist that his disciples stole his body, to make it seem as if he had risen from the dead. Our own narrative claims that the Jews themselves have taken Yeshu’s body, and when his disciples found no body, they insisted that he ascended to Heaven, and that the Jews are lying. But since

⁷⁵ Presumably, misreading אחדרו either as Aramaic אאוו, ‘they hurried’, or as Hebrew חרדו, ‘they hurried’ (as in 1 Sam. 21.2, etc.).

the Jews know where the body was buried, they can easily refute the charges by exhuming the body, as we shall soon see.

8.6. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Pilatus Asks Yehudah about Yeshu's Body

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Ar2, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb4, Heb5

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| Ar1 | Immediately Pelatus summoned Yehudah the gardener, and said to him: "The body of Yeshu—what did you (sg.) do with it?" | מיד קריה פלטוס ליהודה גננא ואמ' ליה פיגריה דיישו מאי עבדת ליה. |
| Ar2 | [Pelatus] the governor [summoned] Yehudah the gardener, and said to him: "The man [whom you have crucified...]" ⁷⁶ | [וקרייה פלטוס] הגמונא ליהודה גננא ואמר ל'יה גברא [...] |
| Ar4 | Pelatus the governor summoned Yehudah the gardener, and said to him: "The man whom you (pl.) have crucified—what did you (sg.) do with his body?" | וקרייה פלטוס הגמונא ליהודה גננא ואמ' ליה גברא [ד]צליבתא ⁷⁷ פגריה [מ]ה עבדת ליה. |
| JA1 | When the word had spread, [the ki]ng summoned Yehudah the gardener and said to him: "The man whom you (sg.) have crucified—what did you do with him?" | פלמא כתר אלכלאם אסתדעא [אלמ]לך ב[י]הודה אֶלְגֵּן פקאל לה אלרגל אלדי צלבתה איש עמלת בה. |

⁷⁶ Ar2 breaks off here.

⁷⁷ Lege: [ד]צליבתון. For Ar4's confusion of *waw-nun* and *aleph* at the end of words see also above, 8.3, and below, 8.11.

- JA2 Then Pelitus summoned חנינד דעא פליטוס ביהודה
Yehudah the orchard-man, and אלבסתנבאני וקאל לה. ג'תה ישו
said to him: "The body of איש עמלת בהא.
Yeshu—what did you (sg.) do
with it?"
- Heb1 Then they⁷⁸ summoned Pelatus אז קראו לפלטוס ההגמון ושלחו
the governor, and they sent and וקראו ליהודה בעל הגן שקברוהו בגנו
summoned Yehudah, the owner ואמרו לו האיש אשר תלינו אותו
of the garden in whose garden נבלתו מה נהיה.⁷⁹
they buried him (i.e., Yeshu),
and they said to him: "The man
whom we have hung—what
happened (to) his body?"
- Heb2 Petalus the governor said to ויאמר פטלוס השר ליהודה הפרדסי
Yehudah the orchard-man: האיש אשר תליֶתָה אותו גופו מה
"The man whom you (sg.) have עשית בה.
hung—what did you (sg.) do
with his body?"
- Heb3 "This man whom you (pl.) have זה האיש אשר תליתם אותו גופו מה
hung—his body, what did you עֲשִׂיתֶם בה.
(pl.) do with it?"
- Heb4 Immediately [Pilatu?]'s s[ent] מיד שְׁ[לח? פילטו?]ס וקרא לֶ[בִּי] ...
and summoned R[abbi ...] [יהושע יהודי⁸⁰]
Yehoshu'a Yehudah

⁷⁸ It is not really clear whether 'they' refers to Yeshu's followers or to those who buried him in Yehudah's garden, but the end of the sentence refers to 'the man whom we have hung'.

⁷⁹ Lege: מה נהיה לה, or a similar expression.

⁸⁰ The word יהודה is surrounded by a frame, perhaps as a sign for deletion. For Heb4's confusion between Yehuda and Yehoshu'a at this point, see above, 8.4. Heb4 breaks off here.

Heb5 Immediately Caesar decreed upon them that they should come to him with Yeshu's body. So they decreed a fast. And Yehudah the gardener went out and was eating in the market (some) of the cucumbers that he was selling in the market, and he was unaware of what had happened, since his hearing was bad.⁸¹ And Israel (i.e., the Jews) said to him: "Why do you eat when Israel are in trouble, and you are calm?" He said to them: "But what happened?" They said to him: "Such and Such a thing."	מיד גזר עליהם קיסר שיבואו אליו בנבלתו של ישו לפיכך גזרו תענית ויצא יהודה גננא והוא אוכל בשוק מן הקשואים שהוא מוכר בשוק ואינו יודע מה נעשה לפי שהוא לוקה באזניו ואמרו לו ישראל למה אתה אוכל וישראל בצרה ואתה בנחת אמ' להם ומה נעשה אמרו לו כך וכך הדבר .
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The Aramaic textual witnesses display only minor differences, with Ar2 and Ar4 calling Pilatus 'the governor' and Ar1 omitting this epithet, which in other passages it too uses. Also, whereas Ar1 has Pilatus referring to Yeshu's body, Ar4 and probably Ar2 as well, refer to him as 'the man whom you have crucified', and then refer to his body. JA1 follows Ar2 and Ar4, but has 'the king', i.e., Tiberinus, rather than Pilatus, summon Yehudah, and only after 'the word had spread'. JA2 is very close to Ar1, but translates 'gardener' as בסתנבאני, as in 6.3 and 8.4. Heb1, on the other hand, offers a confused translation, probably due to a mis-translation of a phrase such as וקרייה פלטוס הגמונא ליהודה גננא

⁸¹ Lit., 'since he was harmed (or, deficient) in his ears'.

which the translator understood as if someone called Pelatus, who then called Yehudah the gardener. Moreover, Heb1 has the question phrased as ‘the man whom *we* have crucified’, but it is not clear who is meant by this ‘we’. Heb2, and perhaps Heb3 as well, omit the initial verb (‘summoned’), but otherwise follow the text of Ar4, except that ‘the gardener’ is once again translated as *הפרדסי*. Interestingly, Heb3 (and perhaps also Heb2) refers to a male noun (*גופו*) as if it were female (*בה*), and will do so again in the next passage (see the adjective *נשארה*, below). This could reflect the influence of Arabic (*ג'ת'ה*, f.) rather than Aramaic (*פגר*, m.), but it is quite possible that the translator had in front of him the Aramaic (and Hebrew) word *נבילה* (f.), rather than *פגר*. Heb4 is poorly preserved, and once again confuses Yehudah with Yehoshu‘a, and Heb5 adds a new subplot—about the search for Yeshu’s body and how Yehudah the gardener missed it, since he was deaf—a story that is not found in any of the other textual witnesses and must be a late addition to the text (for Yehudah as an ‘owner of cucumbers’, see already Heb5’s expansion in 8.4).

8.7. The Fate of Yeshu’s Body: Yehudah Says That Yeshu’s Body is in His Garden

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, JA2, Heb1, Heb2/Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	R. Yehudah answered and said to him (i.e., Pilatus): “My master! Yeshu the wicked knew what is written in the Torah, ‘Do not let his corpse’, etc., ⁸²	מתיב ר' יהודה ואמ' ליה מרי יישו רשיעא ידע מה דכת' באורייתא לא תבית נבילתיה וג' ואטעי {יה}>יתהון לאינשי אילין ואמ' להון אם אתיתון מחר ולא תשכחון יתי על
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⁸² Deut. 21.23.

and he misled these people,
and said to them, 'If you come
tomorrow and do not find me
on the cross, you will know
that I ascended to Heaven'. And
now, if our master wishes, I
will bring him, and will show
his body to them, and they will
bel[ieve], and they [will kn]ow
that it is Yeshu the wicked."⁸³

Ar3 "... '[...] on the cr[oss]' and he
said] to the people whom he
[misled], "If you come
tomorrow, and do not f[in]d
my body—know that I
ascended to Heaven. Now, if
our master wishes, I will bring
him and will show his body."⁸⁵

Ar4 R. Yehudah answered: "My
master! Yeshu the wicked knew
what is written in the Torah,
'Do not let his corpse remain
overnight on the cross', and he
misled these people, and said
to them, 'If you come and do

צליב[א] תדעון דילשמיא סליקת
והשתא אי צבי מרנא אנא איתי יתיה
ואחזי ית פיגריה להון ו[י]הי[מ]נ[ו]ן⁸⁴
וי[דעון] דיישו רשיעא הוא.

[...] עַל צֶלֶב[יבא ואמר?] לְאִינְשֵׁי
דְאָ[טעין] יתִיהִי⁸⁶ אִם אֶתֹנֹן אֶתּוֹ
לְמָחָר וְלֹא אֶשׁ[כח]תֹּן פְּגִירָא אִידְעֹן
דְּלִשְׁמִיא סְלִיקַתְּ הַשְׁתָּא אִם צְבִי
מֵרָאנָא אֲנָא מִיִּתְיָה יִתְיָה וּמַחֲיִי⁸⁷ יֵת
פְּגִרָיָה.

מתיב ר' יהודה מרי ישו רשיעא [י]דע
מָה דכח' בא' ל'ת'נ'ע'צ'י⁸⁸ ואטעי
[י]תהון לאינשי אילין ואמ' להון אם
אתיתון ולא אשכחתון יתי על צליבא
לשמיא סליקת והשתא אם צבי מרנא
אנא איתי יתיה ואיחזי ית פגריה להון
ויהימנון וידעון דיישו רשיעא הוא.

⁸³ Or: 'that Yeshu is wicked'.

⁸⁴ The reading of this word is doubtful, but is supported by Ar4.

⁸⁵ If we do not adopt the emendation to מחזי or מחוי, the translation would be 'I (will) bring him and revive his corpse'.

⁸⁶ Lege: יתהון.

⁸⁷ Lege: מחזי or מחוי.

⁸⁸ I.e., באורייתא, לא תבית נבילתיה על צליבא.

not find me on the cross—I
ascended to Heaven'. And now,
if our master wishes, I will
bring him, and will show his
body to them, and they will
believe and will know that it is
Yeshu the wicked.”⁸⁹

JA1 And he (i.e., Yehudah) said: “I
buried him in the garden.” And
the king said to him: “What is
this calumny that is hea[rd?”
And he said] to him: “Oh king,
the cursed Yeshu knew [that it
is wr]itten in the Torah that
one who is crucified—‘Do not
let his corpse remain overnight
on the tree’, and he deceived
his followers and said to them:
‘If you come tomorrow and do
not find me on the cross, know
that I ascended to [Heav]en’.”

JA2 Yehudah answered and said:
“My master, Yeshu the wicked
knew what is written in the
Torah, ‘Do not let his corpse
remain overnight on the cross,

פקאל דפֿנֿתָהּ פֿי אֶלְגִּנְ[א] פֿקאל לה
אלמלך איש הִדָּה אלשנאע⁹⁰
אֶלְמַסְמָ[ועה פקאל] לה איוה אלמלך
אן ישו אלמלעון כאן יעלם [בא]ִ
[מכ]תֹּוב פֿי אלתורה אן אל מצלוב
לתבִּי[ת]⁹¹ נְבִילתָה עלי אלכשבה
פאגר⁹² אצחאבה וקאל להם אִן גִּיתִם
גדא ולם תִּגְדוּנִי עלי אלצליב אעלמו
אני קד צ'עדת⁹³ אלי [אלס]מָא.

אג'אב יהודה וקאל יא סִידִי ישו
אלט'אלם כאן יעלם אלמכתוב פֿי
אלתוראה לא תבִּית נבִילתָה עלי
אלצליב בל אדפנה פֿי דלך אליוס
ואט'ל⁹⁴ האולי אלקום קאילא אן

⁸⁹ Or: ‘that Yeshu is wicked’.

⁹⁰ Lege: אֶלְשִׁנְאָע, or אֶלְמַסְמָ[ועה], and cf. Blau (2006, 350).

⁹¹ Lege: לֹא תבִּית, and cf. our comment on this spelling below.

⁹² I.e., אָגַר = אָגַר, ‘to mislead, beguile, delude’.

⁹³ Lege: צעדת.

⁹⁴ I.e., אָוֶל, and cf. JA2’s text in 6.2 and 8.5.

but bury it on that day', and he misled these people and said: 'If you come in the morning and do not see me on the cross, know that I ascended [to Heaven ...]'."

Heb1 Yehudah answered and said to them: "My master(s)! This Yeshu the wicked knew what is written in our Torah, 'Do not let (the corpse) remain overnight' etc., and he misled these people with his words, and said to them, 'If you come tomorrow you will not find me on the tree, for I will ascend to Heaven'. Now, if our master(s) wish(es), I will show his body to everyone,⁹⁶ and everyone will believe that it is Yeshu the wicked."

Heb2 He (i.e., Yehudah) answered and said to him that: "Yeshu'a the wicked, before he was raised upon the tree, was

ג'יתם באלגד'אָה ולם תרוני עלי
אלצליב פאעלמו אני צעדת [...]⁹⁵

ענה יהודה ואמר להם אי אדני זה
יישו הרשע היה יודע מה שכת'
בתורתינו לא תלין וגו' והתעה
לאנשים⁹⁷ אלה בדבריו באמור להם
אם תבואו למחר לא תמצאוני על
העץ כי אעלה לשמים עתה אם רצון
אדוני אני אראה את נבלתו לע<י>ני
הכל ויאמינו הכל כי הוא ישו הרשע.

ענה ויאמר לו כי ישוע הרשע לפני
אשר יעלו אותו [א]ל העץ היה קורא
לא[נשים א]שר היה מחטיא אותם
ויאמר...⁹⁸

⁹⁵ JA2 breaks off here.

⁹⁶ Lit., 'to the eyes of all'.

⁹⁷ Lege: התעה את האנשים, but note that ל- reflects the Aramaic from which Heb1's text was translated.

⁹⁸ Heb2 breaks off here.

calling the p[eople w]hom he
was leading into sin, and said
[to them...].”

Heb3 He (i.e., Yehudah) said: “It אמר נשאר.
(i.e., the body) remained.”⁹⁹

Heb5 He said to them: “He is already אמ' להם כבר הוא בגנתי סחבו אותו
in my garden. The rainwater מי הגשמים.
dragged him.”

There are only minor differences between the Aramaic texts (inasmuch as they are extant): Ar1 and Ar3 refer to ‘tomorrow’, but Ar4 does not; Ar1 and Ar4 have Yeshu refer to finding ‘me on the cross’, but Ar3 only refers to ‘my body’. More importantly, Ar1 and Ar4 have a whole clause on how Yeshu’s followers will be convinced by the sight of his body that he indeed is ‘Yeshu the wicked’ (that is, that Yeshu is indeed dead, and did not ascend to Heaven)—a clause that is not found in Ar3, but is echoed below, in 8.10. JA1 has an additional dialogue between Yehudah and the king (who already was identified as Yehudah’s interlocutor in the previous passage in JA1). It also has Yehudah cite Deut. 21.23 in Judaeo-Arabic, in a version that is different from Saadia’s, and different from the one cited by JA2 in 8.1 and 8.3, and in the current passage. Here too, we may be dealing with a pre-Saadian, or an ad hoc, translation, since forms such as לתבית (for לא תבית) are very typical of the early Judaeo-Arabic texts in the phonetic spelling. But whereas both JA1 and JA2 follow Ar3 in not having a clause about Yeshu’s followers being convinced by the sight of his body, Heb1 does present this clause, in line

⁹⁹ This obscure answer probably resulted from a mistranslation of a source-text, or from an attempt to fill in a lacuna in the text.

with Ar1 and Ar4. In Heb2, not much of the text has been preserved, but in Heb3 the text is very heavily abridged, with Yehudah only stating that the body 'remained'.¹⁰⁰ As we shall see in the next passage, the clause about convincing Yeshu's followers appears in Heb3, but is put in Pilatus' mouth. Finally, Heb5 goes its own way, by having Yehudah merely state that the body was carried by the rainwater into his own garden, as was described by Heb5 in 8.4.

8.8. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Pilatus (or Tiberinus) Tells Yehudah to Dig Yeshu's Body Out

Textual witnesses: Ar3, JA1, Heb1, Heb3 (this passage is omitted in Ar1, Ar4 and Heb5)

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| Ar3 | He said to him (i.e., Yehudah): | אמ' ליה אזיל אפיק יתיה. |
| | "Go and bring him out." | |
| JA1 | And the king said to Yehudah the gardener: "Dig him out and bring him." | פקאל אלמלך ליהודה אלגנאן אנבשה ואחצרה. |
| Heb1 | He (i.e., Pilatus) commanded him (i.e., Yehudah). | גזר בו |
| Heb3 | And Pelatus answered and said to Yehudah: "Now go and bring Yeshu'a the wicked into the market, until his believers believe that he was truly killed." | ויען פלטוס ויאמר ליהודה עתה לך והביא את [י]שוע הרשע לתוך השוק עד שיאמיניו ¹⁰¹ בו מאמיניו שנהרג באמת. |

¹⁰⁰ For the f. verbal form used for the m. noun גופו, 'his body', see our comments on the previous passage.

¹⁰¹ Lege: שיאמינו; both the spelling and the vocalisation reflect the scribe's confusion at this point.

This passage appears in only some of the textual witnesses, and is omitted in Ar1 and Ar4 (as well as in Heb5), but does appear in Ar3. JA1 follows Ar3, but explicitly refers to ‘the king’ as the subject, in line with what it said in the last two passages, whereas in Ar3 this is less clear, mainly because Ar3 is lacunose in the previous passages; however, in **8.10**, Ar3 clearly speaks of ‘the king’ rather than ‘Pilatus’ and the same may have been true here as well. Heb1 has a very laconic summary of the passage’s contents, and Heb3 has Pelatus telling Yehudah to bring Yeshu to the market, so that his followers will believe that he is really dead—an idea that some of the textual witnesses placed in Yehudah’s mouth, as we saw in the previous passage.

8.9. The Fate of Yeshu’s Body: Yeshu’s Body is Dragged through the Streets of Tiberias

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, Heb1, Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	R. Yehudah the gardener went and brought him up from his tomb, and threw a rope on his leg and dragged him in all the street[s of Tiberias], and proclaimed upon him: “This is Yeshu, son of Pandera, the wicked, who rebelled against the God [of Heaven], besides whom there is none.” ¹⁰²	ואזל ר' יהודה גננא ואסקיה מן קיבריה ורמא חבל[א] בברעיה [נ]גרר יתיה בכל שוק[י טבריה] ואכריז עלוהי הדין יישו בר פנדרא רשיעא דימר[ד] באלה[א דשמיא] ¹⁰³ דלית ליה תני.
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¹⁰² Lit., ‘who has no second’, i.e., no divine figure besides Him.

¹⁰³ The lacuna seems insufficient for באלה[א רבה דשמיא].

- Ar3 Yehudah the gardener went and took him out, and dragged him in the streets of Tiberias, and proclaimed and said: "This is Yeshu, son of Pandera, who rebelled against the great God who is in Heaven."
- Ar4 R. Yehudah the gardener went and brought him up from his tomb, and threw a rope on his leg and dragged him in all the streets of Tiberias, and they proclaimed upon him: "This is Yeshu, son of Pandera, the wicked, who rebelled against the great God of Heaven, besides whom there is [none]."
- JA1 Yehudah the gardener dug him out and fastened a rope to his leg and dragged him through the markets of Tiberias. And it was proclaimed about him: "This is Yeshu the heretic who violated God's will—recognise him!"
- ואזל יהודה גנאה¹⁰⁴ ואפיק יתיה וגמר¹⁰⁵ יתיה בשוקי טבריה ואכריז ואמר דין הוא ישו בן פן פנדריה¹⁰⁶ דמרד באלהא רבא דבשמיא.
- ואזל ר' יהודה גננא ואסקיה מן קבריה ורמא חבלא בכרעיה וגר יתיה בכל שוקי טבריה ואכריזו עלוהי הדין ישו בר פנדירא רשיעא דימרד באַלהא רבא [ד]שמיא דלית ל[י]ה [תני]
- פנבשה יהודה אלגנאן ושד פי רגלה חבל וגרה פי אסואק טבריה ונודי עליה הדא¹⁰⁷ ישו אַלמארק אלדי נכת בטאעת אללה פֿאערפּוה.

¹⁰⁴ For Ar3's use of this Babylonian Aramaic word for 'gardener', see above, in our comments on 4.2.

¹⁰⁵ Lege: וגרר.

¹⁰⁶ Lege: ישו בן פנדירה.

¹⁰⁷ Lege: הדא.

- Heb1 He (i.e., Yehudah) went and got (him) out of the tomb, and they tied a rope to his legs, and they were dragging him like a dog in the market of Tiberias, and the crier would say: "Look, everyone! Is this Yeshu son of Pandera or not? Indeed, this is he who rebelled against the God of Heaven, who has no image or form."
- Heb3 Yehudah went and tied a rope to his (i.e., Yeshu's) leg, and he dragged him in the markets of the great Rome, and they proclaimed about him: "This is Yeshu'a the wicked who rebelled against God, besides whom there is none,¹⁰⁸ and who has no o[ther] equal (to Him), forever."
- Heb5 He (i.e., Yehudah) brought them (i.e., to his garden)¹¹⁰ and showed them Yeshu the wicked. Immediately they tied (?) a rope to his leg, and dragged him face down.¹¹¹
- והלך והוציא מן הקבר וקשרו חבל ברגליו והיו מושכין אותו כמ' כלב בתוך השוק של טבריא והיה המכריז אומ' ראו הכל זה ישו בן פנדירא או לא הלא זה הוא שמרד באלהי השמים שאין [ל]ו דמות וצורה.
- וילך¹⁰⁹ יהודה ויקשור חבל ברגלו וימשוך אתו בתוך שוקיה רומיה רבתא [ו]יכריזו עליו זה ישוע הרשע אשר מרד על אלוה אשר אין שיני לו ולא שתף [אח]ר לעולמים.
- והביאם והראם את ישו הרש' מיד עשו¹¹² חבל ברגלו וסחבוהו על פניו.

¹⁰⁸ Lit., 'who has no second', i.e., no divine figure besides Him.

¹⁰⁹ Lege: וילך.

¹¹⁰ Or: 'He brought them (Yeshu's body)'.

¹¹¹ Lit., 'on his face'.

¹¹² Lege: קשרו, or שמו?

In this passage, the Aramaic textual witnesses are split, with Ar1 and Ar4 presenting the same basic text, and Ar3 presenting a shorter text, with no reference to the tomb, to tying a rope around Yeshu's leg, or to God having no one besides Him. Moreover, Ar3 presents the *af^{el}* form of נפק as against Ar1 and Ar4's *af^{el}* of סלק, a difference that is due to the graphic similarity between *samekh* and *peh*. In this case, both Ar3 and Heb1, and the use of אפק in 9.1, support the reading of Ar3.¹¹³

JA1 has one of the elements not found in Ar3, namely, the reference to the rope, but not the other two, and it includes a proclamation to those who witness the event to recognise that the body is Yeshu's. It also states that Yeshu violated God's will, a statement that already appeared in JA1's text in 1.1. Heb1 has all three of these elements, but it modifies the last one, from 'besides whom there is none' to 'who has no image or form'. And it has one additional element, namely, the comparison to dragging a dog, an element that is found in some of the manuscripts of the 'Helena' recension, and probably reflects Heb1's familiarity with that recension, which is also reflected elsewhere, and especially in the introductory interpolation.¹¹⁴ Heb3 has two of the elements (and does not mention the tomb), but to 'besides whom there is

¹¹³ See above, section III.1 of the Introduction.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. Add. Quarto 145 (= Neubauer 2407) (#21687), fol. 60v: והוציאוהו וקשרוהו אותו (!) בחבלים, וגררוהו כמו כלב מוסרח ויוליכוהו ברחובות ירושלים, 'and they dug him (i.e., Yeshu) out, and bound him with ropes, and dragged him like a stinking dog and paraded him in the streets of Jerusalem'. And cf. Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:177–78, 205, 249, 301 and 303).

none' it adds 'and who has no other equal (to Him), forever', echoing what Heb2/Heb3 already said in 4.1. More importantly, Heb3 changes the place where the whole scene takes place, from Tiberias to 'the great Rome'; as these words are given in (slightly garbled) Aramaic (שוקיה רומיה רבתא), it is possible that Heb3 was translated from an Aramaic text which referred to Rome, or to the Galilean village Ro(u)ma (see also Heb2/Heb3 in 1.1, and Heb1 in 1.2, and our comments there). Heb5 goes its own way, by preserving the element of the rope and the dragging, but omitting the rest.

In addition to these textual variations, we may note that in the Aramaic texts, Yeshu's body is dragged through the שוק, a word that means both 'street' and 'market'. Heb3 leaves this word in its Aramaic form, but JA1 and Heb1 translate it with the cognate Arabic word סוק and the Hebrew word שוק. However, in both these languages, this word is used in a more limited sense of 'market', rather than 'street', so the text's meaning has slightly changed in both languages.

The story of how Yeshu's body was dragged through the streets may have been known to Tertullian, who mockingly notes, in a passage that we already quoted in our comments on 7.8, that 'maybe it was the gardener who removed him, lest his lettuces be damaged by the crowd of visitors' (*vel hortulanus detraxit, ne lactucae suae frequentia commeantium adlaederentur*).¹¹⁵ The important verb here is *detraho*, which can mean 'to remove', as we have just translated, but also means 'to pull, draw, drag (a

¹¹⁵ Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 30.

person) away'.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, Tertullian does not provide any details about how the gardener would have 'removed' or 'dragged' the body of Jesus. But whereas assuming Tertullian's familiarity with our scene is at best speculative, Amulo's knowledge thereof, in the mid-ninth century, is beyond any doubt. In his *On the Perfidy of the Jews* he states that the Jews apply to Jesus, and to his Christian followers, various verses from Isa. 14, and, after quoting Isa. 14.19–20, he provides further details:

And they say that when he was taken by their elders off the cross, and buried in a tomb, he was once again dug out of the tomb (*de sepulcro extractum*), so that everyone will know that he was dead, and did not come back to life (*ut omnes scirent mortuum, nec resuscitatum*); and he was dragged by a twisted rope¹¹⁷ through the whole town (*et retorta per totam civitatem tractum*) and cast away in this manner.¹¹⁸

We shall return to Amulo's description below, but should also note a possible reference to this scene in a fragmentary Hebrew philosophical or mystical text, which—in an attempt to demonstrate the power of the stars and of demons to hinder a man's wishes—provides an illustrative example:

¹¹⁶ See Glare (1968, 531), and cf. Amulo's and Jerome's use of *traho* in the passages cited below.

¹¹⁷ Amulo's *retorta* in fact refers to a contraption made of twisted branches, and see du Cange et al. (1883-1887, VII:164). Herbers-Rauhut (2017, 79) translates *retorta tractum* as 'an einem flochtenen Strick gezogen', i.e., 'pulled on a braided rope'.

¹¹⁸ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 39–40 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 76–79).

You surely heard the stories about Yeshu‘a the Nazarene (ישוע הנצרי), and the events that happened to him, and the hardships he suffered. Did the stars and the demons save him when he was hung on a tree and his body was dragged in the burial of a donkey (בהתלותו על עץ ונבלתו נסחבה בקבורת)
(חמור)?¹¹⁹

That Jesus was hung, i.e., crucified, on a tree was common knowledge, but the claim that his body was dragged seems to be based on our scene. Unfortunately, the author behind this reference remains anonymous, and one cannot tell whether he had access to *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, or only heard about the dragging of Yeshu‘a’s body through indirect channels.

Like the crucifixion on a cabbage stalk (above, 7.8), the dragging of Yeshu’s body through the streets might seem quite unusual. It must be stressed, however, that such actions were common from the earliest stages of human history (think, for example, of Hector’s body being dragged by Achilles in *Iliad*, 22.395–404 and 24.14–21), and remain just as common today (think, for example, of how ISIS terrorists tied the bodies of their slain victims to their vehicles, and dragged them for all to see).¹²⁰ In late antiquity, numerous examples are recorded of bodies that were dragged through the streets as a public display of defeat and humiliation, and often also as a warning to all who watched the scene or heard about it that such would be the fate of whoever

¹¹⁹ T-S AS 213.23 (a parchment fragment; the text is vocalised). For ‘the burial of an donkey’, see Jer. 22.19 (cited below), to which this text implicitly alludes.

¹²⁰ For the widespread use of such practices in antiquity, see the studies collected in Karakantza et al. (2025).

runs afoul of the authorities or of the mob. In Rome, the bodies of tyrants, rebels and executed criminals often were dragged with a hook through the streets and thrown into the Tiber or into the sewers that flowed into it.¹²¹ In one instance, in 190 CE, Marcus Aurelius Cleander was beheaded, and his head was stuck on a spear and paraded through the streets of Rome. His rivals, goaded by the emperor Commodus, also killed his two sons and his friends, and 'dragged their bodies (σύροντές τε τὰ σώματα) and shamefully degraded them in every way until finally the mutilated bodies were thrown into the sewers (ἐς τοὺς ὀχετοὺς φέροντες).¹²² In another instance, in 222 CE, the bodies of Elagabalus and his mother were 'dragged through the whole city for a long time and mutilated, and thrown into the sewers which run down to the River Tiber (ἐς τοὺς ὀχετοὺς... τοὺς ἐς τὸν Θύβριν ποταμὸν ῥέοντας).¹²³ The dragging of bodies—alive or dead—also

¹²¹ See, for example, Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.4; Appian, *Bel. Civ.* 2.18.134; Historia Augusta, *Commodus* 17.4, 18.5–7, 19.2, etc.; Cassius Dio 74.2.1, and Kyle (1998, 219–28).

¹²² Herodian, 1.13.6 (LCL tr., with some modifications), and cf. Cassius Dio 73.13.6.

¹²³ Herodian, 5.8.9 (LCL tr., with minor modifications). The *Historia Augusta* provides a more colourful account, describing how 'his body was dragged (*tractus*) through the streets, and the soldiers further insulted it by thrusting it into a sewer (*in cloacam*). But since the sewer chanced to be too small to admit the corpse, they attached a weight to it to keep it from floating, and hurled it from the Aemilian Bridge into the Tiber, in order that it might never be buried. The body was also dragged (*tractum*) around the Circus before it was thrown into the Tiber' (Historia Augusta, *Elagabalus* 17.1–3, LCL tr.).

is a recurrent motif in Christian martyrologies. Hippolytus of Rome, for example, is said to have been tied to wild horses and then dragged through a field of thorns and thistles, and similar stories are told of many other martyrs.¹²⁴

The practice of dragging a body through the streets of the town was well known to the Jews of late antiquity.¹²⁵ Already in the Hebrew Bible, the prophet Jeremiah warns King Yehoyakim that ‘He shall be buried the burial of a donkey, dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem’.¹²⁶ In rabbinic *halakha* there are no injunctions to mistreat the bodies of sinners and heretics, but the rabbis did tell many stories about persons who suffered such a fate.¹²⁷ In their retelling of the story of the biblical Shebna, who was active at the time when Sennacherib was besieging Jerusalem, they relate how he went to the Assyrian camp, but the Assyrians were angry with him and ‘pierced his heels and hung him from the tails of their horses and dragged him on the

¹²⁴ For Hippolytus, see Lapidge (2018, 188–89, 193–94, 344). For similar stories about other Christian martyrs, see Lapidge (2018, 295 and 549); for many more examples, see Filipczak (2017, 339).

¹²⁵ For earlier discussions of this theme, see Lieberman (1965, 507–8 and 518).

¹²⁶ Jer. 22.19.

¹²⁷ See Büchler (1903), and Ben-Menahem (2020). In what follows, I ignore the claim (in m Pes 4.9 and bt Ber 10b) that Hezekiah גִּירַר עֲצָמוֹת אָבִיו עַל מִטָּה שֶׁל חֲבָלִים, ‘ground the bones of his father (i.e., King Aḥaz) on a bed of ropes’, since it did not involve the dragging of the entire corpse.

thorns and the thistles'.¹²⁸ A very similar description appears elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud, as well as in the so-called 'scholion' to the *Scroll of Fasting*, in a story that relates how the Samaritans incited Alexander the Great against the Jews and their Temple. The story ends with a description of how Alexander handed them over to Simon the Just, who 'pierced their heels, and they (i.e., the Jews) hung them behind horses,¹²⁹ and dragged them on the thorns and the thistles all the way to Mt Gerizim'.¹³⁰

Another story found in rabbinic literature is less specific, but no less revealing. It relates of two sinners who performed the same sins in this world, but in the next world one of them ended up with the sinners, whereas the other ended up with the righteous. When the former sinner protested this apparent injustice, he was told:

You fool! after your death you were (i.e., your body was) maltreated (מגול היית) for three days, and were not placed in a coffin, and were dragged by ropes to your tomb (ובחבלים גררוך לקבר); maggots were placed under you, and

¹²⁸ See bt San 26a-b; this story is partly based on a playful *midrash* on Isaiah's mocking speech to Shebna in Isa. 22.15–25, and especially his prophecy that 'Behold, the Lord will throw you away violently... and will toss you like a ball into a wide country; there you will die, and there will your chariots of glory become the disgrace of the house of your master' (Isa. 22.17–18).

¹²⁹ Or, in another version, 'hung them from the tails of their horses'.

¹³⁰ Another version has 'they (i.e., the Jews) placed thorns in the Samaritans' legs and dragged them'. The same story appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 69a. See Noam (2003, 102, 153, and 262) and Rosenthal, (2008, 363, 373, and 379).

worms covered you, and your friend saw you maltreated and swore to repent from his wicked way, and he repented like a righteous person.¹³¹

Clearly, the practice of dragging the bodies of sinners with ropes was not unusual in the world of the rabbinic story-tellers.

In what is perhaps the closest parallel to our scene, the rabbis also recounted a story of how the body of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was exhumed and dragged through the streets. In one version of the story, Evil-Merodach, who was thrown into prison by his father, refused to believe that his father Nebuchadnezzar was dead ‘until they dragged him (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar) and threw him in front of him’ (עד שגררוהו והשליכוהו מלפניו).¹³² In another version, it is Evil-Merodach himself who ‘took him (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar) out (of his tomb) and dragged him’ (הוציאו).¹³³ And in a third version, which is even closer to our scene, we read that when Nebuchadnezzar died, and Evil-Merodach wanted to replace him on the throne, the Babylonians were afraid that perhaps Nebuchadnezzar did not really die (since he had been living in the wilderness for seven years, as in Dan. 4.33), and would punish them upon his return. Evil-Merodach insisted that ‘Nebuchadnezzar is dead and is out of the world, and yet until now you do not believe (it)?’ (לית אתון מהמנין). To convince them that his father was really dead, he ‘entered the royal storehouses, and took out iron and bronze chains, and cast them upon

¹³¹ Eccl.R. 1.15 (Hirshman 2016, 210); a parallel story is found in Ruth R. 3.3 (Lerner 1971, II:86–89).

¹³² Lev.R. 18.2 (Margalioth 1953–1960, 403–4).

¹³³ Avot de-Rabbi Nathan B 17 (Schechter 1887, 37).

the heels (ורמא בעקבו) of Nebuchadnezzar, his father, and pulled and went out and took him out of his tomb (וואפיק יתיה מן קבריה).¹³⁴ Interestingly, all three versions cite Isa. 14.19—‘you were cast out of your tomb like a detested sprout’—a verse that our narrative already cited in 5.8.¹³⁵ More interesting still, Jerome knew of this Jewish tradition, and in his commentary on Isa. 14.18–19 he says that the Jews tell a story (*fabula*) of how when Evil-Merodach wanted his potentates to believe that his father Nebuchadnezzar indeed was dead (*ut fidem patris mortui faceret*) he ‘opened his tomb, and dragged his body with a hook and ropes’ (*aperuit sepulcrum, et cadaver eius unco et funibus traxit*).¹³⁶

This last example provides a close parallel to our scene, since in both cases it is clear that dragging the dead body for everyone to see was not only a form of abuse, but was also intended *to prove that the person in question was really dead*. This is a point to which we shall return in our comments on the next passage. For the time being, let us note that the similarity between the two stories was not lost on one of our text’s earliest

¹³⁴ Targum Sheni to Est. 1.1; David (1898, 1–2); Ego (1996, 145–47); Grossfeld (1994, 24). The story is also found in Seder Olam Rabbah 28 (see Milikowsky 2013, I:314 and II:447–49), and in different manuscripts of the Tanḥuma-Yelamdenu, and see Urbach (1966, 29).

¹³⁵ This connection re-emerges in a *qerovah* for the seventh day of Passover (!) by the tenth-century *payyetan* Shime’on ben Yitzḥaq, who says of Nebuchadnezzar, בכפר, וכןצר נתעב הושלך מקברו / ובואש בשרו, ‘When his time (to die) came, his corpse was dragged, and like detested sprout he was thrown out of his tomb, and his flesh rotted like a trampled corpse’. See Habermann (1938, 67).

¹³⁶ Jerome, *In Esaiam* V.14.18/20 (Adriaen 1963, 169–70).

hearers, namely, Amulo. As we already noted, he was familiar with the story of how Jesus' body was dragged through the streets as a proof that he did not come back from the dead. Having related this story, Amulo goes on to add elements not found in our narrative, such as the claim—attributed to the Jews—that Jesus' tomb was left empty until Amulo's own days, but is full of stones and filth which the Jews are accustomed to throw into it (see below, our comments on 8.12). But he immediately adds that 'The impious forefathers of these impious men interpreted this place in the prophetic text (i.e., of Isaiah) with the true history of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, as recounted by the Blessed Jerome', after which he cites the passage from Jerome which we have just discussed. 'But they (i.e., the Jews)', he adds, 'in their great hatred of Christ, and their rabid desire for blasphemy, contrived such things, and thus turned the Lord Christ into a curse to those who hear them'.¹³⁷

Although Amulo is a medieval Christian writer, his suspicion that the nasty story about Jesus may be related to the very similar story about King Nebuchadnezzar may well be justified. In a long *piyyut* in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, a series of wicked Gentiles complain to Haman about their fate, and compare it with his; the only non-biblical figure who is mentioned in this poem is Jesus (who is called ܒ[ܠ]ܢܝ, 'someone', in order not to mention his name), and he is immediately followed by Nebuchadnezzar (who is called 'the dwarf', in line with the *midrashic* understanding of

¹³⁷ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 40 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 78–80).

שְׁפָלֵ אֲנָשִׁים, 'the lowest of men', in Dan. 4.1).¹³⁸ Thus, we can be certain that the analogy between these two figures was made by Jews already in late antiquity. Moreover, Amulo also says that he himself saw how the Jews ambush those who converted from their perfidious ways, and were baptised, and say to them, 'What wrong is there, if you believe in Christ? But just remember that God has none who is similar or equal to him' (*Quid mali est si credis in Christum? Hoc tantum tene, quia similem sibi et aequalem deus non habet*).¹³⁹ This reproach, hurled by the Jews of Lyons against their fellow Jews who converted to Christianity, may be a distant echo of the proclamation about God that is embedded in our passage, and should surely serve as a clue to what function our text might have played in the Jewish community of Lyons in the ninth century.

But let us return to late-antique Palestine. One more incident that may elucidate our passage is said to have taken place during the short reign of Julian 'the Apostate' (361–363 CE), when a bronze statue which was identified as that of Christ was toppled and mistreated by the 'pagans' of Paneas (Caesarea Philippi). Sozomenus merely states that it was 'dragged around the city and mutilated by the pagans', but Philostorgius, as abridged by Photius, says that the 'pagans' pulled the statue down from its pediment, and then 'tied its feet and dragged it in the middle of the main street' (τῶν ποδῶν ἐκδησάμενοι, διὰ μέσης ἔσυρον τῆς

¹³⁸ Sokoloff and Yahalom (1999, 216–19, no. 33). Lieber (2018, 123–24); see also Münz-Manor (2012).

¹³⁹ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 42 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 84). For the beginning of the sentence, see section II.2.5 of the Introduction.

λεωφόρου).¹⁴⁰ It is, of course, quite possible that the story of how Yeshu's body was dragged through the streets of Tiberias and the dragging of Jesus' statue through the streets of Paneas are entirely unrelated, but one is tempted to suggest that they stem from the same period, and reflect the same mentality.¹⁴¹ In a society marred by religious hostilities between 'pagans' and Christians and between Christians and Jews, such acts of aggression, and stories about them, must have been quite common.¹⁴²

Two final notes. In Ar1 and Ar3, Yehudah the gardener makes his proclamation over the body of Yeshu, whereas in Ar4 and Heb3 we are told that 'they' made the proclamation; a similar formulation is found in JA1, which uses the passive form, 'it was

¹⁴⁰ Sozomenus, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.21; Philostorgius, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.3. See also Wilson (2006–2007).

¹⁴¹ The practice of dragging statues of dead enemies whose own bodies were beyond reach was well known in the Jewish world as well; note, for example, how the story in the 'scholion' to the *Scroll of Fasting* of Caligula's attempt to set up his statue in the Temple ends with the claim that when the emperor's messenger reached Antipatris, he received a letter stating that Caligula was dead. 'Immediately, he took the statues and gave them to Israel (i.e., to the Jews), and they dragged them'. See Noam (2003, 114, 283, and esp. 290).

¹⁴² Another story, from a later period, was told by the ninth-century chronicler Theophanes, who related how in the early seventh century the Jews of Antioch initiated an anti-Christian riot, during which they slaughtered Anastasius, the great patriarch of Antioch, after thrusting his genitals into his mouth, and dragging him through the main street (σύραντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὴν Μέσσην), after which they also killed many of the city's landowners and burnt their bodies. See Frendo (1982); Horowitz (2006, 239–40), and Filipczak (2017, 339 and n. 99).

proclaimed', whereas Heb1 refers to 'a crier' who made the proclamation. This is reminiscent of the Talmudic story of how, when Yeshu was about to be hung, 'a crier would come out before him for forty days (crying) "Yeshu'a the Nazarene is going to be stoned since he practised magic, and incited and misled the Jews (into idolatry); whoever knows anything in his merit should come and testify." They did not find any merit for him, and hung him on the eve of Passover'.¹⁴³ However, it is very clear that the two stories are independent of each other, and move in very different directions, both in terms of when the proclamation was made and in terms of what was proclaimed. Moreover, such public proclamations are a common feature in the *Acta* literature, since they add a more 'official' tone to the description of the legal proceedings.¹⁴⁴ In our own text, it serves as proof that all of Yeshu's followers could see his body with their own eyes, and realise that he never ascended to heaven.

The contents of the proclamation also merit some attention. To the best of my knowledge, the expression דלית ליה תני, 'who has no second', is unattested in other Aramaic texts, but it is paralleled by the Hebrew expression אין לו שני, that is found, for example, in the poems of Eleazar the Qallir, who says of God that והוא אל אחד, ואין לו שני, 'and he is a single God, and he has no

¹⁴³ See bt San 43a, and cf. our comments on Ibn Shaprut's text in 7.2.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*: 'The proconsul Saturninus had the following proclaimed by a herald...' (Musurillo 1972, 89) or *Acts of Euplus*: 'And the herald made this proclamation: "Behold Euplius the Christian, an enemy of our emperors and our gods!"' (Musurillo 1972, 319).

second'.¹⁴⁵ A more elaborate formula is found in a dream-request ritual that is attested in several copies in the Cairo Genizah and echoes expressions found in the Hekhalot literature. Within this ritual, God—or God's Name—is described as *אשר הוא אחד ואין לו שני ואין לו דומה ואין לו שותף ואין לו תמורה*, 'who is one, and has no second, and has no(thing that is) similar, and has no equal, and has no substitute'.¹⁴⁶ Such a formula may lie behind Ar1's (and Ar4's?) *שאין [ל]ו דמות וצורה*, as well as well as Heb1's *דלית ליה תני* and Heb3's *אשר אין שיני לו ולא שתף [אח]ר לעולמים*.

8.10. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Yeshu's Body is Presented to Pilatus (or to Tiberinus); Some of Yeshu's Followers Concede That He Did Not Ascend to Heaven, but Others Do Not

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, Heb1, Heb3, Heb5

- Ar1 He (i.e., Yehudah) brought him *ואובליה ק[מ]י פילטוס וקר[א] ...*
 (i.e., Yeshu) [bef]ore Pilatus, *מן דהימ[ינ]י ודלא הימינו.*
 and he summo[n]ed ... and
 there were] those who believed
 (that it is the body of Yeshu),
 and those who did not believe.
- Ar3 He brought him before the *ואובליה לקדם מלכא וקרא [...]*
 king, and he summoned [...]

¹⁴⁵ Eleazar ha-Qallir, *Qerovah to וזאת הברכה*, cited from the Maagarim website (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/>).

¹⁴⁶ See Bellusci (2016, 234–38).

- Ar4 [He brought] him to Pelatus the governor, and he summoned [the people] whom [he had mis]led, and there were those who believed, and there were those who did not bel[ieve].
- JA1 Some of his followers believed it (i.e., that it is the body of Yeshu) and some of them did not believe.
- Heb1 They brought him before Pilatus, and he saw [that] it was Yeshu. And his stench was carried to a great distance, and all those who saw him could not stand (the stench).
- Heb3 He (i.e., Yehudah) revealed him and his face,¹⁴⁷ and all those who believed in him saw him (i.e., saw Yeshu's body).
- Heb5 They brought him to the king, and the king saw him, and had faith in the Lord, and in the words of the Sages. And the people who erred after him—
- וואובל]יה לות פלטוס הגמונא וקר' [ית]הון¹⁴⁷ [לאינשי דאט]עי יתהון והוו דהימינו והוו דלא הימ'ינו].
- בעץ אצחאבה אמנו בדלך ובעצהם לא יאמן.
- הביאוהו לפני פלטוס וראה [כי] הוא ישו וסרחונו היה הולך למרחוק לא היו היו¹⁴⁸ יכולין כל רואיו לסבול.
- ויגלה אתו ואת פניו ויראו אתו כל מאמיניו.
- והביאוהו אל המלך וראה אותו המלך והאמן ביי' ובדברי חכמים והאנשים שתעו אחריהם מאמינים ומהם אינם מאמינים ואחר הדבר עמד מהאנשים שלא האמינו ועשו להם דת

¹⁴⁷ The reading of this word is uncertain, but cf. a similar construction in Ar4 at 8.7.

¹⁴⁸ A dittography, due to the move from the end of one page to the beginning of the next one; but cf. our comments on Heb1's text in 0.6.

¹⁴⁹ Note that in the previous passage, Heb5 claimed that Yeshu was dragged *face down*.

some of them believe (i.e., that it is the body of Yeshu), and some of them do not believe. And after this, some of the people who did not believe rose and made themselves a religion, and said: "It is written, 'My soul detests your new moons and your holidays'."¹⁵⁰ And they erred after his (i.e., Yeshu's) words, and they made for themselves a Scripture, and they are these Christians, in every place and in every time. And the rumor spread in all the foolish nation, and they called his name 'Isa son of Mariam, and this is that which the Gentiles say that the angel came and blew inside the womb (i.e., of Mary), and from this she gave birth to this son (i.e., Yeshu).

ואמרו כתיב חדשיכם ומועדיכם
שנאה נפשי ותעו אחר דבריו ועשו
להם כתב והם הנצרים האלו בכל
מקום ובכל זמן והלכה שמועה בכל
עמא טפשא וקראו שמו עיסא בן
מרים והוא הדבר שהגוים אומרים
המלאך בא ונפח בבית הרחם
והולידה ממנו זה הבן.

The three Aramaic textual witnesses—inasmuch as they are preserved—offer the same basic text, with minor differences. The most important difference is that in Ar3 it is once again the king (i.e., Tiberinus) who is in charge, whereas in Ar1 and Ar4 it is Pilatus. JA1 offers an abridged translation, referring neither to Pilatus nor to the king, and Heb3 offers an abridged translation that is different from that of the other textual witnesses, and ends

¹⁵⁰ Isa. 1.14.

the entire narrative here. In Heb1 it is Pilatus who is in charge, but the text also includes a detailed reference to the stench exuding from Yeshu's body, an element that is not found in any of the other textual witnesses, and which builds on Heb1's claim in the previous passage that that Yeshu's body was dragged 'like a stinking dog' (בְּמוֹ כֶּלֶב מוֹסֵרָח).¹⁵¹ And Heb5 offers a translation of the Aramaic text, except that here the protagonist is the king, as in Ar3, and there is also an additional description of how the king himself 'had faith in the Lord, and in the words of the Sages'. Moreover, as Heb5 often does, it adds a long passage which is not found in any of the other textual witnesses—namely, a description of the rise and growth of Christianity.¹⁵² That this description was added in an Arabic-speaking environment is made clear by the name given to Jesus, 'Isa son of Mariam, which is the common appellation for Jesus in Arabic (عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ), and by the

¹⁵¹ See our comments on the previous passage. Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 39 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 76) attributes to the Jews the claim that the foul smell that is prevalent in the morning hours in the early summer is due to the belches of Jesus as he is suffering torments in Hell because he had disturbed their nation and the entire world. However, this claim probably was based on the famous Talmudic claim that Yeshu is eternally punished in the Netherworld in boiling excrement (bt Gitt 57a), and not on our text.

¹⁵² And note the expression עַמַּא טַפְשָׁא, 'a foolish nation', which is based on Targum Onqelos to Deut. 32.21, where God says 'I will provoke their anger by a foolish nation' (בְּגוֹי נָבִל). The same expression will re-appear in 9.4.

claim that the angel (i.e., Gabriel) blew into Mary's womb, which echoes the Muslim stories about the miraculous conception.¹⁵³

The claim that Yesu's body was brought before Pilate (or King Tiberinus) is echoed—and refuted—in a Christian text which is currently known as the *Lament of the Virgin*, but is sometimes referred to as the *Gospel of Gamaliel*. This text is extant in Ethiopic and in Arabic (including some manuscripts in Garshuni, i.e., Arabic written in the Syriac alphabet), as well as several fragments in Coptic.¹⁵⁴ In this text, we find a detailed description of what happened around the tomb of Jesus after he was crucified, including the claim that he was a magician, and that his magical powers continue to work even after his death. But when the Jews insist that Jesus did not rise from the dead, Pilate wants to see his body, and so,

The Jews preceded Pilate and the centurion to the well which was in the garden (البئر الذي في البستان), and it was a deep well... And they went down to the bottom of the well, and found in it the dead man shrouded and laid in a separate place. And the Jews shouted: "Here is the Nazarene

¹⁵³ See Qur'an 66.12: *وَمَرْيَمَ أَنْبَأْتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا*, 'And Mariam, the daughter of Imran, guarded her chastity, and we blew our spirit inside her...' and cf. Qur'an 21.91; for the occurrence of this claim in later Muslim sources see, for example, Thackston (1997, 328): 'Gabriel stretched out his hand toward her (i.e., Mary) and breathed into her; the breath reached her womb, and she conceived Jesus'. See further Zellentin (2025, 52).

¹⁵⁴ For the Ethiopic texts, see van den Oudenrijn (1959, 2–83). For the Garshuni texts, see Mingana (1928). For the Coptic fragments, see Suciu (2012).

sorcerer (الساحر الناصري) who gave us so much trouble! You say that he rose, and he is at the bottom of the well!"¹⁵⁵

Moreover, when Pilate refuses to believe that the body is that of Jesus, the Jews insist that even if he does not believe it, they still do.¹⁵⁶ The relevance of this passage for the study of *Toledot Yeshu* was noted by several earlier scholars, from Schonfield onwards.¹⁵⁷ However, not only do we hear once again that the Jews claim that Jesus was buried in a well—as we already noted in our comments on 8.4—we also hear that they showed his body to Pilate in order to prove that he had not risen from the dead. As may be expected, the Christian text goes on to say that the body turned out to be that of one of the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus, but this claim sounds very much like a refutation of the Jewish claims that Pilate saw Jesus' body with his own eyes. This does not necessarily prove a direct dependence on *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, but this Christian story probably belongs in the same world in which the Jewish story circulated.

¹⁵⁵ Translated by Mingana (1928, 207); the Garshuni text is on page 237, and I transliterated it in Arabic letters (for الذي, one would expect النبي). For the Ethiopic text, and a German translation, see van den Oudenrijn (1959, 66–67).

¹⁵⁶ Mingana (1928, 208); van den Oudenrijn (1959, 68–69).

¹⁵⁷ See especially Schonfield (1937, 99–101, 121), and Newman (1999, 70–71).

8.11. The Fate of Yeshu's Body: Pilatus (or Tiberinus) Tells Yehudah to Re-bury Yeshu's Body

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar4, JA1, Heb1 (this passage is omitted in Heb3 and Heb5)

- Ar1 [Pi]latu[s the governor?] answered [... “This person?] whom you buried in the water-trough—and now, go and bury [him in the p]lace [where they bury] the dead.”
- Ar4 Pelatus the governor [answered] and said to Yehudah the gardener: “[...] whom you (pl.?) buried in the water-trough—and now, hurry¹⁵⁹ and bury him in the place where they bury the dead.”
- JA1 Then the king said to Yehudah: “[Just] as you saw fit when
- מִתִּיב [פ]לָטוּס הַגְמוּנָא? [...] דְּקִבְרַת יִתְיָה בְּבֵית שְׁקִיא דְּמִיָּא וְהִשְׁתָּא זִיל וְקִבֵּר [יִתְיָה בֵּא] תְּרָא¹⁵⁸ דְּקִבְרִין בִּיה מִיִּתְיָא.
- [מִתִּיב] פִּלְטוּס הַגְמוּנָא וְאִמְ' לִיהוּדָה גִּנָּא מ[.....] נָךְ דְּקִבְרַתָּא¹⁶⁰ יִתְיָה בֵּית¹⁶¹ שְׁקִיָּא דְּמִיָּא וְהִשְׁתָּא אַחֲשֵׁ¹⁶² וְקִבֵּר יִתְיָה בְּאִתְרָא דְּקִבְרִין בִּיה מִיִּתְיָא.
- תָּם קֵאל אֶל[מ] לָךְ לִיהוּדָה [כ?] מֵא¹⁶³ רֵאִית אֶלְצוּאב פִּי דְּפִנָךְ לָה פִּי

¹⁵⁸ The readings of וְקִבֵּר and of בְּאִתְרָא are very doubtful.

¹⁵⁹ Or: ‘go’.

¹⁶⁰ Lege: דְּקִבְרִתוֹן? (for the same phenomenon, see our comments on Ar4’s text in 8.3 and 8.6).

¹⁶¹ Lege: בְּבֵית. For such haplographies, see above, 6.8, n. 90.

¹⁶² The reading אִיזִילוּ or אִיזִילוּ¹⁰⁰⁰⁰ is also possible.

¹⁶³ Or: מֵא[ל].

burying him in the garden,¹⁶⁴ אלגנאך¹⁶⁵ אדפנ[ה] מע[סא]י[ר]¹⁶⁶
bury him with the [rest of?] the אל אמואת .
dead.”

Heb1 Then the governor decreed אז גזר ההגמון ליה>ו<דה בעל הגן זה
upon Yehudah the owner of the שהיה משכו לך קברהו במקום אחר .
garden—the one who was drag-
ging him (i.e., Yeshu)—“Go
bury him in another place.”

As much as we can tell from their fragmentary remains, the two extant Aramaic textual witnesses seem to present very similar texts. But whereas Ar1 had earlier told us (in 8.4) that Yehudah buried Yeshu in the רהטא דמיא in his garden, and Ar2 and Ar4 probably had the same reading (with Ar2's [רהטא] דמיא and Ar4's [רהטא] דמיא), we now read in Ar1 and Ar4 that he buried Yeshu in the בית שקיא דמיא, this being an Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew word רהט.¹⁶⁷ JA1 presents a similar text, except that the speaker is the king, and not Pilatus, and the translation is quite paraphrastic. Heb1 follows the Aramaic texts in presenting Pilatus as the speaker, but his instructions to Yehudah are far less specific than those found in Ar1 and Ar4—or in JA1—for rather

¹⁶⁴ Or: ‘Why did you see fit to bury him in the garden?’

¹⁶⁵ Lege: אלגנאן.

¹⁶⁶ The reconstruction of this word is very tentative, and many other words could fit here.

¹⁶⁷ And cf. Gen. 30.38, where בְּרִהָטִים is followed by an explanatory gloss—בְּשִׁקְתוֹת הַמִּים אֲשֶׁר תִּבְאֵן הַצֹּאן לְשָׂתוֹת—for which Targum Onqelos has ברהטיא, אתר בית שקיא דמיא, אתר די אתין ענא למשתי במורכייא, בשקייתא דמיא, אתר דאתיין ענא למשתי, תמן, and Targum Neofiti has בשקיא דמיא דתיעול ענא למשתי.

than telling him to bury Yeshu where the dead are buried, he tells him to bury him ‘in another place’.

8.12. The Fate of Yeshu’s Body: Yeshu is Re-buried

Textual witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, Heb1 (this passage is omitted in Heb3 and Heb5)

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| Ar1 | Yehudah the gardener went
and buried him (i.e., Yeshu) in
the [wa]ter-holes (?). | אזל יהודה גננא וקבר יתיה בְּרִיא
[ד]מִ[א] |
| Ar3 | [... ...] in the water- holes (?)
[... ...] | [] וּבְרִיָא דְמִא [] |
| Ar4 | Yehudah the gardener went
and buried him in the water-
holes (?). | 168 אזל יהודה גננא וקבר יתיה בברויא
דמיא. |
| JA1 | And he (i.e., Yehudah) did so. | פפעל דלך. |
| Heb1 | He went and buried him again,
in front of all his followers, ¹⁶⁹
in his garden; and the water
would pass over the boundary
(of the garden?). ¹⁷⁰ | הלך וקברו עוד בעיני הכל שהיו
הולכין אחריו בגן שלו והמים עוברים
על גבול. ¹⁷¹ |

Ar1 and Ar4 probably preserve an identical text, but unfortunately it is quite obscure, since in Ar1 the most important words are corrupt; it so happens that these two words are extant in Ar3, but there too the reading is uncertain. In line with Pilate’s injunction in the previous passage, we would expect a description of how Yehudah buried Yeshu in a cemetery. However, in Ar4, the

¹⁶⁸ Or: בברויא.

¹⁶⁹ Lit., ‘in the eyes of everyone who was walking after him’.

¹⁷⁰ Or: ‘over his (i.e., Yeshu’s) back’, and cf. the following note.

¹⁷¹ Lege: גבו?

reading is בברזיא דמיא, which could be translated as 'in the water-holes', but it is not really clear whether this is a general term, or a specific place in Tiberias.¹⁷² In Ar3 the reading is בברזיא דמיא, which is quite meaningless, and in Ar1 the two words are mostly illegible.¹⁷³ The translator of JA1 may have been puzzled by this description, so he merely stated that Yehudah did what he was told to do. Heb1 once again diverges from the Aramaic texts, both by stating that all of Yeshu's followers could see him being buried, and by making an obscure statement about water, which probably is an attempt to translate, or paraphrase, the Aramaic texts' reference to the בברזיא דמיא.

As we noted in our comments on 8.4, Commodian heard of Jews who claimed that, 'We threw him (i.e., Jesus) into a well (or, a pit)' (*In puteum misimus illum*). And as we noted in our comments on 8.10, the *Gospel of Gamaliel* tells quite an elaborate story of the body of Jesus being found in a well. Both sources might lend further support to the understanding of the corrupt

¹⁷² For earlier discussions of this point, see Horbury (1971, 103–5).

¹⁷³ This place seems to reappear in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*; for example, in MS Jerusalem, Benayahu B 25 (#43794), fol. 38r and in MS Sassoon 793 (#9074), page 364, we learn that ואח"כ קברו אותו במקום פריזתה (!) פריזתה, 'and then they buried him (i.e., Yeshu) in another place, whose name is PRYZTH'. The same sentence is found in MS Jerusalem, NLI Heb. 8°864 (#B 43 (8°864)), fol. 84r, where the place is called פריזתה, PRZYT'. See Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:134); the word פריזה, in the sense of 'a residential area', is attested already in the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Cook 2015, 194), but probably is not what the Aramaic text(s) had in mind.

words as ‘water-holes’, or some sort of well or pit into which Yeshu’s body was thrown. And as we briefly mentioned above, in our comments on 8.9, Amulo states that the Jews relate that after Jesus’ body was extracted from his tomb and dragged through the whole town,

He was cast away in this manner, and because of this his tomb remains empty to this very day, and is squalid, and full of stones and filth, which they habitually throw into it (*sicque proiectum et propter hoc usque hodie sepulcrum eius stare vacuum et esse squalidum lapidibus et sordibus, quae ipsi proicere soleant, plenum*).¹⁷⁴

It is therefore quite possible that a local Tiberian tradition pointed to a specific place where Yeshu’s body was supposedly buried, and that this location became a locus of anti-Christian rituals. However, it is also possible that Amulo was basing himself on the old Christian claim that the Jews were in the habit of desecrating the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Note, for example, the story of *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre*, copied in two sixth/seventh-century Coptic papyri, where it is claimed that the Jews had been piling so much garbage on the tomb of Jesus that it became the highest point in Jerusalem and took three months to dig up!¹⁷⁵ It is hard to tell whether such claims are based on

¹⁷⁴ Amulo, *De perfidia Iudaeorum* 40 (Herbers-Rauhut 2017, 78).

¹⁷⁵ See Orlandi et al. (1980, 52–55, 58–59, and cf. 80–81), for the claim that the Jews also filled the place where Jesus had washed his disciples’ feet with human and animal bones.

real historical events (e.g., during the Persian or the Muslim conquests of Jerusalem),¹⁷⁶ or on Christian fantasies, but be this as it may, our text insists that Yeshu was buried in Tiberias, at a specific location whose exact nature still eludes us.

¹⁷⁶ In the Muslim world, it was common to twist the name the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which the Christians called كنيسة القيامة, 'the Church of the Resurrection', into كنيسة القمامة, 'the church of filth'. See Frenkel (2008, 167); Tal (2014, 105 and 473).

9.0. Concluding Passages

We have reached the end of our narrative, and now move on to several concluding passages, that—together with passages 1.1–1.3—frame the entire narrative and provide its proper context. They also serve to enhance the ‘official’ appearance of the text, as the ‘authentic’ protocols of the trials of Yeshu.

Heb3 and Heb5 omit most of the following passages, and immediately move to the curses and blessings of 9.4.

9.1. Concluding Passages: The Dates of the Different Events

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, Heb1 (this passage is omitted in Heb3 and Heb5)

Ar1	[The day on which] Yeshu the wicked, the Nazarene, [was cruc]ified was the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan. And when they returned and br[ought] him out of his tomb and dragged him in the streets of Tiberias—it was the twenty-first of the month of Nisan.	[ויומא דאי] צליב [ביה] יישו רשיעא נצראה ארבסר יומי לירח נ[י]סן הוה וכד הדרו וא[פקו]ניה מן קבריה וגרדו [י]תיה בשוקי טבריה עשרין וחד לירח ניסן הוה.
Ar3	[The day] on which Yeshu [was crucified] was the fourteenth of Nisan, and when [they returned] (and) brought him out of the tomb (?) (in) which	[ויומ]א ד[<אצטליב>] ביה ישו יום ארבעת עשר בניסן <וכד[הדרו]> כד אפקוהי מן סיכא ¹ דהוה קביר <וגרירו> יתיה בשוקי טבריה יום עשרין וחד בניסן.

¹ Lege: סימא? The word סיכה means ‘peg, nail, plowshare’, and does not fit the context. For the Greek σῆμα, ‘tomb’, see below.

he was buried and dragged him
through the streets of Tiberias,
(it was) day twenty-first of
Nisan.

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| Ar4 | The day on which Yeshu the Nazarene, the wicked, was crucified was the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan. And when they returned and brou[ght h]im out of [his tom]b and dragged [him in the streets of Ti]berias [... twe]nty-first of the month of [Nisa]n. | ויומא דאיצטליב ביה ישו הנצרי
רשיעא ארביסר יומא ליר[ח]א דנִיִסן
וכד [ה]דרו ואפ[קו י]תיה מן
קב[ריה] וגרו יתי[ה בשוקי] דטבריה
[] [ע]שר[ין] וחד בירחא [דניס]ן |
| JA1 | The day of Yeshu was the fourteenth of Nisan, and the day Yeshu was dug out or dragged through the markets of Tiberias was the twenty-second of Nisan. | ויום ישו כאן י"ד פי ניסן ויום אן נִוִבֶשׁ
אוּ גר פי אלאסואק טבריה כאן כ"ב
פי ניסן. |
| Heb1 | The day on which they hung him (was) in the month of Nisan, on the fourteenth thereof. | יום שתלוהו בחדש ניסן בי"ד יום בו. |

Ar1 and Ar4 are almost identical, and Ar3 is quite similar, except that it omits the reference to Yeshu as a Nazarene and as wicked, and that it probably had the Greek word for a tomb, σίμα, instead of the Aramaic one, קבר.² JA1 abridges the text, and also claims that the dragging of Yeshu's body took place on the twenty-second

² This loanword, *σῆμα*, 'tomb, grave', is as yet unattested in the Aramaic dictionaries, but cf. Sokoloff (2009, 1005).

of Nisan, rather than the twenty-first. This may be due to a scribal error, but may also reflect an assumption that, as the twenty-first of Nisan is a holiday (the end of the Passover week), it would not have been a *halakhically* suitable day in which to exhume a body and drag it in the streets of Tiberias. Interestingly, the author(s) and copyists of the Aramaic texts seem not to have been troubled by this issue. Heb1 abridges the text even further, and only provides the date on which Yeshu was crucified, whereas Heb3 and Heb5 skip these passages, and move directly to the ending formulae.

The claim that Yeshu was crucified on the fourteenth of Nisan is shared in common by our text, by the Talmud (bt San 43a), and by the Gospel of John. In the synoptic Gospels, it is clear that Jesus had the Passover meal—held on the fourteenth of Nisan—with his disciples (Matt. 26.17–20; Mark 14.12–17; Luke 22.7–14), was caught later that night (Matt. 26.30–57; Mark 14.26–53; Luke 22.39–54), and was crucified on the following morning (Matt. 27.35–36; Mark 15.24–25; Luke 23.44), on a day that is explicitly described as a holiday (Matt. 27.15; Mark 15.6), that is, the fifteenth of Nisan. But in the Gospel of John, Jesus is brought before Pilate on the morning before the Passover meal (John 18.28), and is crucified on the same day, which is also described as ‘the day of preparation for’, or ‘the evening of’ the Passover (παρασκευῇ τοῦ πάσχα, John 19.14, cf. 19.31), that is, the fourteenth of Nisan. However, with the exception of Heb1, which will allude to the Passover in the following passage, none of the textual witnesses even mention that the crucifixion of Yeshu took place on the Eve of Passover.

The inclusion of specific dates in our text may also be read as a part of its authors' attempt to make it look more 'official' and 'authentic'. In fact, we know from several different sources that other 'authentic' records of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus also provided specific dates, but did so according to the Roman calendar. In the Greek versions of the *Acta Pilati*, the date is given as 'the eighth day before the Kalends of April, which is the twenty-fifth of March'.³ And Epiphanius, in his attempt to show that the Quartodecimans err in celebrating Easter on the fourteenth of the lunar month, says that some of them even boast that they have found the exact date 'in the supposed *Acts of Pilate* (τῶν Ἀκτῶν δῆθεν Πιλάτου), in which it is said that the Savior suffered on the eighth day before the Kalends of April' (ἐν οἷς ἐμφέρεται τῇ πρὸ ὀκτῶ καλανδῶν Ἀπριλλίων τὸν σωτῆρα πεπονθέναι), i.e., on the twenty-fifth of March.⁴ Epiphanius then adds that he himself had found copies of the *Acts of Pilate* (ἀντίγραφα Ἀκτῶν Πιλάτου) which say that the passion occurred on the fifteenth before the Kalends of April, but that he himself is convinced that it took place on the thirteenth before the Kalends of April, that is, on the twentieth of March.⁵ In a similar fashion, an anonymous homily of 387 CE also refers to the eighth day before the Kalends of April as the

³ See *Acta Pilati*, prologue (Tischendorf 1853, 205). For references to the date of the Passion in the *Acta Pilati* and in Patristic literature, see Dubois (1991, 94–98), and Furrer and Guignard (2013, 154–62).

⁴ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 50.1.5 (Holl 1915–1933, II:245); I have used, and slightly modified, the translation by Williams (2013, 24); see also Furrer and Guignard (2013, 196–98).

⁵ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 50.1.8 (Holl 1915–1933, II: 245).

date of the crucifixion, as witnessed by the ‘protocols carried out under Pilate’ (τὰ ὑπομνήματα τὰ ἐπὶ Πιλάτου πραχθέντα).⁶ It is impossible to tell whether these were Christian *Acta Pilati* texts or the forged imperial protocols of the trial of Jesus mentioned by Eusebius, but in either case, the inclusion of a specific date for the death of Jesus seems to have been a constituent feature of this genre. Moreover, if the Quartodecimans indeed adduced an *Acts of Pilate* text as support for their practice of celebrating Easter on the fourteenth of the lunar month, then that text provided the same date for the crucifixion of Jesus as *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*.

For our own purpose, the question of when the crucifixion took place is of lesser relevance, but the claim that different copies of the *Acts of Pilate* provided exact—though different—dates helps explain why our text too wanted to supply exact dates for the crucifixion of Yeshu. However, contrary to what we may have expected, *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* does not state in which year this took place. We already know from 1.1 and 1.2 that the proceedings against Yeshu began in year four (or, if we follow the text of Heb2/Heb3, year two) of Tiberinus Caesar, but throughout the rest of the text no mention is made of any specific year. As the proceedings began on the twenty-eighth of Elul (see above, 1.3), and the doomed pregnancy of Tiberinus’ daughter lasted nine months, or even a whole year (see above, 6.11), a year and a half must have passed until Yeshu was crucified on the fourteenth of Nisan, in year six of Tiberinus’ reign. And if we assume that the

⁶ See Floëri and Nautin (1957, 127).

story of Tiberinus' daughter was not there in an earlier version of our text, the crucifixion would take place in year five of Tiberinus' reign, some six-and-a-half months after Pilatus' initial investigation.

As noted above, the claim that Yeshu was crucified on the fourteenth of Nisan is also found in the Talmud, in the Gospel of John, and in many later Christian sources. Its appearance in our text therefore calls for no specific explanation. However, the choice of the twenty-first of Nisan as the date on which Yeshu's body was exhumed and dragged through the streets of Tiberias was not determined by the stories about Jesus that circulated in late antiquity, but may be due to a very different set of considerations. From the narrative itself (passages **8.5–8.10**), we cannot tell how many days have passed between the crucifixion and the exhumation and public display of Yeshu's body, but we now learn that this took place exactly one week after the crucifixion.⁷ The narrative's authors probably were aware of the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after he was crucified, and so chose a longer time period, in order to prove that even after the third day his body could still be exhumed and displayed to his followers. But why our text chose the twenty-first

⁷ This claim is also found in other versions of *Toledot Yeshu*; for example, in MS Jerusalem, Benayahu B 25 (#43794), fols 38r-v, and in MS Jerusalem, NLI Heb. 8°864 (#B 43 (8°864)), fol. 84r, we learn that, *ויום שתלו אותו היה ארבעה עשר בניסן ויום שהוציאוהו מן הגנה היה אחד ועשרים*, 'and the day when they hung him (i.e., Yeshu) was the fourteenth of Nisan, and the day they exhumed him from the garden was the twenty-first' (in MS Jerusalem 8°864 the first date is illegible). See Meerson and Schäfer (2014, II:134).

of Nisan as the day on which Yeshu's body was exhumed is not really clear, especially since—as we have just noted—it would have fallen on a holiday. It is quite possible that in some Jewish communities of late antiquity this date was somehow commemorated, or celebrated, as connected with the punishment of Yeshu, but I am currently unaware of any evidence that might support such an hypothesis.⁸ However, the significance of the fourteenth and the twenty-first of Nisan might be reflected in other late-antique Jewish texts. In *Sefer Zerubavel*, a Jewish apocalypse written in the sixth or seventh century, we find several specific dates on which certain events in the eschatological scenario leading to the salvation of the Jews and the destruction of their enemies will supposedly take place.⁹ One such date is the fourteenth of Nisan, the day on which Menaḥem ben Ammiel, who is the Messiah son of David—i.e., the second and final Messiah—will appear in the Valley of Arbel (not far from Tiberias!). Another is the twenty-first of Nisan, the day on which God will redeem the

⁸ One intriguing reference is found in Ilan (1997, 216), who says that the Jews of Tiberias had a custom of visiting the graves of R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and of Yithro on the twenty-second of Nisan. As R. Yehoshu'a is associated with Yeshu both in our text and in the Babylonian Talmud, the choice of this specific date might be significant (or, perhaps this would help explain why JA1 changed 'twenty-first' to 'twenty-second' of Nisan). However, I do not know how ancient this custom is, and Ilan (1997, 227 and 232), says that the Jews of Tiberias also used to visit other ancient graves on the same day.

⁹ For *Sefer Zerubavel*, see above, 1.2, n. 33. Its relevance for the study of the dates offered by our text was highlighted by Reiner (1998, esp. 261–62).

Jews, and Menaḥem ben Ammiel, Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel (the Messiah son of Joseph, who had been killed in a previous battle), and Elijah will come, and bring back to life Jews who had died during the eschatological persecutions, in preparation for the great battle against the Jews' enemies and the final judgment of all the nations.¹⁰

Sefer Zerubavel's choice of the fourteenth of Nisan as an important date in the history of the Jews' future salvation was quite natural: the Exodus from Egypt, which occurred on that date, often served as a model for the Jews' final triumph. But the twenty-first of Nisan is not an important typological date, and the choice of this date by *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and *Sefer Zerubavel* to mark both the demonstration that Yeshu was no son of God and no Messiah, but a mere mortal, and the future appearance of the two Jewish Messiahs and of Elijah, may point to local traditions that were associated with that date in the eastern Galilee in late antiquity. We shall have more to say about these traditions in our comments on the next passage.

¹⁰ For the Hebrew text, see Lévi (1914a, 138), Even-Shmuel (2017, 83, 86 and 453–54), and the text provided by the Maagarim website (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/>). For an English translation, see Himmelfarb (2017, 153–54). And cf. the *piyyut* by the early-seventh century Ele'azar ha-Qallir, who tells his audience that 'On those days, and in that time, in the first month, which is Nisan / indeed in the fourteenth thereof / Menaḥem ben Ammiel will suddenly appear / in the Valley of Arbel his goodness will grow...'; for this *piyyut*, see the transcription of the Genizah fragment T-S H 14.12 in the Maagarim website.

9.2. Concluding Passages: A Curse Upon Those Who Worship Yeshu

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, Ar3, Ar4, JA1, Heb1 (this passage is omitted in Heb3 and Heb5)

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| Ar1 | [He who brought] a great judgment upon Yeshu the wicked—He will quickly bring a judgment and retribution on the enemies of His people, and (on) who[ever aban]dons the worship of the God of H[eaven and wor]ships and [...] and swe]ars by the name of [Yeshu ... and the God of] Heaven will work a miracle for them quickly and within a sh[ort] time. | ו[מן דעבד] דינא רבא ביישו רשיעא
הוא יעביד די[נא ופור]ענותא בעגלא
עם שנאי עמיה וכל [מן דש]בִּק פולחן
אלהא דש[מיה ופ]לח ו[... נש]בע
לשמיא ¹¹ [דיישו ... ואלהא?
ד[שִׁמְיָא] א הו יעביד להון ניסא
בעגלא ובזמן קר[וב]. |
| Ar3 | He who brought a judgment upon Yeshu the wicked and upon his disciples—He will bring a judgment and retribution on whoever abandons the worship of Heaven and worships and bows down to Yeshu the wicked and (on) whoever says, “He ascended to Heaven and is missing (?) ...” ¹² | דעבד דינא בישו רשיעא ובתלמידוי
הוא יעביד דינא ופורענותא מ>ן כל
מאן <דשבק פלחן שִׁמְיָא ופלח
וסער ¹³ לישו רשיעא וכל מן דאמר
לשמיא סליק <ויתחסר>... ¹⁴ |

¹¹ Lege: לשמיה.

¹² The meaning of the last word is not clear, and the text breaks off here.

¹³ Lege: וסגד.

¹⁴ Or: <ויתחסר>. Ar3 breaks off here.

- Ar4 He who brought a [great] judgment [upon Yeshu] the wicked—He will [quic]kly bring a judgment and retribution on the enemies of His people, and (on) whoever abandons the worship of the God of [Heaven] and worships and bows down to the name of Yeshu the wicked ...
- JA1 He who took revenge upon Yeshu—He will take revenge upon the heretics and the worshipers of idols.
- Heb1 He who brought a great judgment upon Egypt in these days¹⁶ and brought (a judgment) upon Yeshu the wicked and his disciples—and bless “As on this day”—and He will bring His judgment and retribution on all the magicians and wizards who err and mislead the world. And whoever will believe and say, “He ascended to Heaven,” and will deny what is written “who ascended to Heaven (and came
- וְדַעַבְדַּדִּינָא [רבא? ביישו] רשיעא
הוא [י]עבִיד דינא ופּוֹרְעֵנוּתָא
בע[גלה] עִם סָנְאִי עמיה וכל מן
דשביק פּוֹלְחֵן אֵילָה [דשמיא] ופּלַח
וסגיד לַשְׁמִיָּה דיישו רשיעא...¹⁵
- ואלדי אנתקם מן ישו [ה]וא ינתקם מן
אלכפאר ומן עובאד אל אותאן.
- ומי שעשה דין גדול במצ' בימים אלה
עשה עם ישו הרשע ובתלמידיו וברכו
כהיו[ם] הזה והוא יעשה דינו
ופרענותו עם כל הכשפנים
והחרטומים שטועים ומתעים את
העולם וכל מי שיאמין ויאמ' עלה
לשמים ויכפור במה שכתו' מי עלה
שמ' וגו' יהא חלקו בגיהנם עם ישו
הרשע וכל בית יש' שעובדים
ומשתחים¹⁷ לאלהי השמים הם יראו
ישועתו ואותותיו ונפלאותיו[ו] שיעשה
באויביו שנ' ונקם ישיב לצ' וגו' הוא
האל אלהי ישראל ימהר גאולתו לעמו
בעגלא ובזמ[ן] קרוב ואמרו אמן.

¹⁵ Ar4 breaks off here.

¹⁶ I.e., on the days of the Passover holiday.

¹⁷ Lege: ומשתחווים.

down)” etc.¹⁸—may his share be in Gehenna, together with Yeshu the wicked. And the whole house of Israel (i.e., all the Jews) who worship and bow down to the God of Heaven—they will witness His salvation and His signs and His wonders that He will bring upon His enemies, as it says, “And He shall return vengeance upon His enemies,” etc.¹⁹ He, the God, the God of Israel will hasten His redemption for His people quickly and within a short time—and say, Amen.

Ar1, Ar3, and Ar4 all agree in expressing a wish that just as God passed His judgment upon Yeshu the wicked, so He may judge and destroy all those who leave His worship and worship Yeshu instead. The claim that God עבד דינא upon Yeshu probably echoes the title and incipit of our text, which speak of the גזר דינא of Yeshu (above, 1.1). In Ar3 we also find an explicit reference to the claim of Yeshu’s followers that he ascended to Heaven; this reference is found in Heb1 as well, and may have appeared in the other textual witnesses. As noted above, in our introduction to 8.0, our text devotes much energy to the refutation of this Christian claim, thus reflecting its centrality in the early Christian mind, and in the Jewish–Christian debates of late antiquity. Ar1

¹⁸ Prov. 30.4.

¹⁹ Deut. 32.43.

and Ar4 share the reference to ‘the enemies of His people’, which is not there in Ar3, but Ar1 also adds another wish—that God will work His miracle in the near future—which is not there in Ar4, but is echoed by Heb1, with both Ar4 and Heb1 using the formula בעגלא ובזמן קריב which is widely attested in late-antique Jewish texts.²⁰ Ar4 refers to those who worship ‘the name of Yeshu the wicked’, whereas Ar3 speaks of worshipping ‘Yeshu the wicked’, and JA1 modifies the wish and expresses the hope that God would punish the heretics and the idolators—a hope which would have sounded much more acceptable to potential Christian or Muslim readers.²¹ And—as often is the case—Heb1 goes its own way: although it still reflects some of the features of the Aramaic text from which it was translated,²² it adds an oblique reference to the fact that Yeshu was punished on the same day on which the Egyptians were punished during the Exodus, wishes for the destruction of all magicians and wizards in addition to those who believe that Yeshu ascended to Heaven, and adds an allusion to a liturgical blessing—which often takes the form of

²⁰ The Aramaic formula בעגלא ובזמן קריב is found in the *Qaddish*, one of the commonest Jewish prayers, and is followed there by ואמר אמן, ‘and say, Amen’, which indeed appears in Heb1, but not in Ar1. However, this formula is also attested in many late-antique Jewish magical texts; see, for example, Shaked et al. (2013, 81), and Bohak (2014a, I:231).

²¹ For this recurrent phenomenon, see our description of JA1 in section II.1.6 of the Introduction.

²² Note esp. the unusual expression יעשה דינו ופרענותו, which partly translates and partly corrupts the Aramaic יעביד דינא ופורענותא.

‘on this day (next year), may we be in Jerusalem’²³—and the citations of two biblical verses. Much of this may have been added to the Hebrew version by the translator or by later editors of Heb1, but the end of the passage—which expresses a wish that God will hasten his salvation ‘quickly and within a short time’—again reflects the Aramaic text from which it was translated, as we can see from its appearance in Ar1.

The curses against those who worship Yeshu are of great interest for the study of Jewish-Christian relations in late antiquity. Christian writers of the first few centuries often complained that the Jews repeatedly curse Jesus and/or those who believe in him.²⁴ Such claims are usually understood by modern scholars as referring to *birkat ha-minim*, ‘the blessing of the heretics’ embedded in the ‘*Amidah*, the Jewish daily prayer, which is recited three times a day.’²⁵ This short ‘blessing’, which in fact is a curse, exists in many forms, and in the earliest extant manuscripts, from the Cairo Genizah, reads, for example,

²³ For this type of blessing, see Elizur (2018).

²⁴ See Krauss (1892, 130–34); Klijn and Reinink (1973, 174–75, 200–1, 218–21, 224–25); Thornton (1986, esp. 424–25), and the studies cited in the following note.

²⁵ For *Birkat ha-Minim* and its place in ancient Jewish-Christian polemics, see Kimelman (1981); Horbury (1982; reprinted in Horbury 1998b, 67–110); Thornton (1987); Rokeah (1998, 78–80); van der Horst (1993–1994; reprinted in van der Horst 1998, 113–24); Horbury (1998a; reprinted in Horbury 1998b, 226–43); Langer (2012, 16–39).

למשומדים אל תהי תקוה, ומלכות זדון מהרה תעקר בימינו, והנצרים
והמינים כרגע יאבדו, ימחו מספר חיים ועם צדיקים אל יכתבו. ברוך אתה
ה' מכניע זדים.

Let there be no hope for the apostates (from Judaism), and
may the kingdom of evil (i.e., the Roman / Byzantine Em-
pire) be uprooted quickly, in our own days, and may the
Nazarenes (i.e., Christians) and the *minim* (i.e., heretics)
perish in a moment, (and) be erased from the Book of Life
and not be written among the righteous. Blessed are You,
Lord, who subdues the evil ones.²⁶

That Epiphanius and Jerome, in the late-fourth century CE, knew
some version of this ‘blessing’ seems clear, since they refer to
curses against the Nazarenes and other sectarians that are uttered
by Jews three times a day, i.e., as a part of the ‘*Amidah*’ prayer.²⁷
However, earlier Christian writers do not refer to such curses as
a part of the daily Jewish liturgy, and mention elements that are
not found in *birkat ha-minin*. Justin Martyr, for example, writing
in the 150s CE, says of the Jews that ‘in your synagogues you curse
those who have faith in Christ’ (καταρώμενοι ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς

²⁶ See Langer and Ehrlich (2007, 72–73); Langer (2012, 187–95); Ehrlich (2013, 165–78).

²⁷ Epiphanius, *Panar.* 29.9.2 (Holl 1915–1933, I:332); Jerome, *In Esaiam* II.5.18/19, XIII.49.7 and XIV.52.5 (Adriaen 1963, 76, 538, and 578); Jerome, *In Amos* I.1.12 (Adriaen 1969, 227), and Agobard, *De Insolentia Iudaeorum* 10 (van Acker 1981, 193), who claims that the Jews curse every day Christ and the Christians, under the name of Nazarenes, as noted by Jerome ‘and admitted by many of the Jews themselves’ (*et de ipsis Iudaeis plerique testantur*). In the *Acta Pilati* (Tischendorf 1853, 263), the Jews curse all those who worship created things, but do not explicitly refer to Jesus or his followers.

ὕμῶν τοὺς πιστεύοντας ἐπὶ τὸν Χριστόν), and goes on to say, ‘Do not say bad things about the one who was crucified, and do not jeer at his bruises’ (Μὴ δὴ... κακὸν τι εἴπητε εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, μηδὲ χλευάσητε αὐτοῦ τοὺς μώλωπας).²⁸ But Jesus is never mentioned in *Birkat ha-Minim*, nor is there any mockery of his bruises (which Justin connects with Isa. 53.5), whereas *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* focusses on Yeshu, tells some nasty stories about him, and celebrates the dragging of his body through the streets of Tiberias. And Justin explicitly says that the Jews claim that Christ was crucified ‘as an enemy of God’ (ὡς ἐχθρὸν θεοῦ), which is quite close to the claim in 1.1 that Yeshu ‘denied the God of Heaven’ (כפר באלהא דשמיא), the claim in 8.9 and in the next passage that he ‘rebelled against the great God of Heaven’ (מרד באלהא רבא דשמיא), and the characterisation of his followers as ‘the enemies of God’s people’ (שנאי עמיה) in the present passage.²⁹ Moreover, whereas *Birkat ha-Minim* is directed not only against the Christians and *minim* but—in most of the textual witnesses—also against the kingdom of evil (i.e., the Roman empire), in our text the Jews and the representatives of that kingdom—including both the Roman king Tiberinus and the Roman governor Pilatus—are united in persecuting Yeshu. All this is not to say that a text like *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* was read in the synagogues in the second century and was known to Justin, but that whoever wrote our text embedded in this passage curses against those who worship Yeshu—curses that probably circulated in the Jewish world

²⁸ Justin, *Dialogue* 16.4 and 137.1, respectively, and cf. 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 123.6; 133.6; 137.2.

²⁹ Justin, *Dialogue* 93.4.

from a very early period, as attested by Christian observers from Justin onwards.

The wish that God will bring a judgment and retribution on His enemies, or those of His people (and in many Jewish circles there is no difference between the two) appears in other Jewish texts in late antiquity, but the identity of these enemies is less explicit. In the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Yoḥanan says that after reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim, one should say,

The God who fights our fights, and judges our judgments,
and revenges our revenge, and punishes our enemies for
us, and pays their due to all those who hate our souls;
blessed are You, the God who punishes all the enemies of
His people Israel on their behalf.³⁰

Another Rabbi then suggests the formula ‘the God who delivers’, and a third opts for combining both liturgical formulae. A slightly more specific description may be found in the Aramaic version of Isa. 33.22, which expands upon the Hebrew original. The Hebrew text says, ‘For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our King—He will deliver us’. But in the Aramaic version, the text reads,

For the Lord is our judge, who by His might brought us out
of Egypt, the Lord is our teacher, who gave us the teaching
of the Torah from Sinai, the Lord is our King—He will de-
liver us, and will work for us the retribution of judgment

³⁰ See bt Meg 21b: אמ' ר' יוחנן. האל הרב את ריבינו והדן את דינינו והנוקם את נקמתינו והנפרע לנו מצרינו והמשלם גמול לכל איבי נפשינו. ב'א יי האל הנפרע לעמו ישראל מכל צריהם. For the analogies between the Scroll of Esther and *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, see above, in our comments on 1.1, 6.9 and 7.8.

הוא יִפְרֹקֶנָּה וַיַּעֲבִיד לָנָא פּוֹרְעָנוֹת דִּין מֶן (upon the camp of Gog (משִׁירִית גּוֹג).³¹

The reference to the Exodus, and especially the reference to judgment and retribution meted out to Gog, sound very much like the wish expressed in our own text, for judgment and retribution upon those who worship Yeshu. Moreover, in one late *midrash*, the place where Gog's soldiers will be buried (see Ezek. 39.11) is said to stretch all the way from the Kidron valley (near Jerusalem) to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.³² This is yet another example of the transfer or recasting of older traditions into the Galilean landscape (as noted above, in our comments on 1.2), and it may also reflect the eschatological hopes of the Galilean Jews in late antiquity. In fact, in the eschatological scenarios of *Sefer Zerubavel*, Menahem ben Ammiel will appear in the Valley of Arbel (cf. our comments on the previous passage), and eventually God Himself 'will fight the war of Gog and Magog, and the

³¹ See Targum Jonathan to Isa. 33.22.

³² See Song of Songs Zuta (Buber 1925, 6a) and *Agadath Shir ha-Shirim* (Schechter 1896, 14): 'R. Nehemiah said: When God will reveal the tomb of Gog and Magog to Israel, the feet of the Shekhina will be on the Mt of Olives, and the burial place of Gog and Magog will open from the right side of the river Kidron, up to Gargashta which is east of the sea of Tiberias, and will go up to NKNSH, for it says (Ezek. 39.11) "The valley of those who pass, east of the sea"'. And cf. Targum Jonathan to Ezek. 39.11: *וְיִהְיֶה בְּעֵדְנָא הַהוּא אֲתִין לְגוֹג אֲתֵר כָּשֶׁר לְבֵית קְבוּרָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחִילָת* 'And at that time I will give Gog a proper place of burial in (the Land of) Israel, in the valley of the passage, east of the Sea of Genosar (i.e., the Sea of Galilee), and it is next to two mountains'. For a fuller discussion, and the identification of Gargashta as Kursi, east of the Sea of Galilee, see Meir (2019).

army of Armilus (the Jewish version of the Antichrist), and they will all fall dead in the Valley of Arbel' (וילחם במלחמת גוג ומגוג) (ובחיל ארמילוס ויפלו כולם מתים בבקעת ארבל).³³ The central place occupied by the Valley of Arbel in the Jews' eschatological imagination in late antiquity is demonstrated by a famous story found in the Palestinian Talmud, of two rabbis of the late-second/early-third century—Rabbi Shime'on ben Ḥalaphta and Rabbi Ḥiyya—who were walking in the Valley of Arbel and discussing the future salvation of the Jews.³⁴ And in Ḥuqoq, some ten kilometres north of Tiberias and the Arbel, the richly decorated mosaic floors of the community's synagogue included a depiction of the four beasts of Daniel's eschatological vision (Dan. 7.3–8), a sure sign of that community's expectation of the fulfilment of the vision of the four kingdoms, followed by the arrival of the Messiah and the salvation of the Jews.³⁵

³³ For the Hebrew text, see Lévi (1914a, 139–40), Even-Shmuel (2017, 87–88 and 459), and the text provided by the Maagarim website (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/>). For an English translation, see Himmelfarb (2017, 155).

³⁴ For this story, see pt Ber 1.1 (2c) and Yoma 3.2 (40b); Song of Songs Rabbah 6.10; Esther Rabbah 10.14, with Reiner 1998, 246–47; for its wider context, see Reiner (2012, 183–85), and Irshai (2013, 114–16).

³⁵ For the four beasts in the Huqoq synagogue mosaics, see Britt and Boustán (2021). For other examples of Jewish eschatological expectations in late-antique Palestine, see Bohak (2023).

9.3. Concluding Passages: The Witnesses to the Proceedings

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1 (this passage is omitted in Heb3 and Heb5)

Ar1	[...] Tiberi[nus] Caesar and Aaligus the governor and Pilatus the governor and Rabbi Yehoshu[‘a ben Peraḥ]iah, and Marinus the great elder of the Jews, and R. Yehudah the gardener, and crowds of the sons of [Tiberias?] ³⁶ —they bear witness that they brought and crucified and killed Yeshu the wicked, who rebelled against the great God of Heaven.	[...] טברינוס קיסר ואאליגוס הגמונא ופילטוס הגמונא ור' יהושע בן פרח]יה ומרינו[ס ס]בא רבה דיהודאי ור' יהודה גנא ואוכלוס[י] דבני [טבר]יא ³⁶ אינון סהדין דאיתוה זקפוהי וקטלוהי ליישו רשיע[א] דימר[ד ב]אלהא רבה דשמיא.
JA1	King Tiberinus Caesar, and Pelatus the governor, and Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah, and Marinus the great elder, and Yehudah the gardener and the whole congregation were present at the execution and crucifixion of Yeshu and his being dragged through the markets of Tiberias.	ואלמלך טברינוס קיסר ופלטוס אלקאיד ויהושוע בן פרחיה ומרינוס אלשיך אלכביר ויהודה אלגנאן וגמיע אלמחפל חצרו קתל [י]שו וצלבה וגרה פי אלאסוא[ק] טבריה.

³⁶ The reconstruction is very tentative, but for Ar1's spelling of Tiberias as טבריא, see above, 6.3.

Heb1 These are the witnesses: King Tiberinus Caesar, and Pilatus the governor, and Altigus his deputy, and R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah, and Marinus—a respected and great elder—and all the community of Israel who are present, and a very large crowd of Gentiles who bore witness concerning Yeshu the wicked, and it (i.e., the crowd?) was also present when he (i.e., the dead Yeshu) was displayed and dragged by his leg with a rope, and when he was buried. And they tried him and hung him on the tree and stoned him and killed [him], since he rebelled against the God of Heaven. And he will have no share in the world to come.

ואלו העדים³⁷ טברינוס קיסר המלך
ופילטוס ההגמון ואלטיגוס משנה שלו
ור' יהושע בן פרחיה ומרינוס זקן
נכבד וגדול וכל עדת יש' הנמצאים
והמון עם רב מאד מהאומות העידו
על יישו הרשע ונמצא גם בהראותו
ובהמשכו מרגלו בחבל ובקבורתו
ושפטוהו ותלוהו על העץ ורגמוהו
והרגו[הו] יען כי מרד באלהי השמים
ולא יהיה לו חלק בעולם הבא.

In all three textual witnesses, the list of witnesses includes Tiberinus Caesar, Pilatus the governor, R. Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah, Marinus the great elder, and a great crowd of people. Unfortunately, the identity of this crowd is not clear, since in Ar1 there is a lacuna at this point, JA1 refers to them with the vague term אַלְמָחֶפֶל, which we translated as 'the congregation' (and note how in 4.3 JA1 had used the word אַלְגַּמְאֵיָה for אוכלוסין), and Heb1

³⁷ These words are highlighted in Heb1 as the title of a new section in the narrative.

claims that they included both the whole Jewish community and many Gentiles. Unfortunately, the earlier references to these אובלוסין do not shed more light on this issue (see our comments on 1.3). In Ar1 and JA1, the list of witnesses also includes (R.) Yehudah the gardener, and although his name is omitted in Heb1, it must have appeared in the original narrative, given his prominent role from the very beginning of the proceedings (see above, 1.3) to their very end (see above, 8.12). More problematic is the appearance in Ar1 and Heb1 of the mysterious אַלְלִיגוֹס / אַלְטִיגוֹס, who is described in Ar1 as a governor, and in Heb1 as Pilatus' deputy, and who already appeared earlier in the narrative (see our comments on 1.2 and 4.3). His name was omitted in JA1, either because this name is an error, which crept into some of the textual witnesses but not into others, or because the translator or editors of JA1 were puzzled by this figure and decided to leave him out of their narrative.

The contents of the testimony of these witnesses also varies from one textual witness to another. Ar1 says that all these witnesses testify how Yeshu was 'brought and crucified and killed', but does not mention the dragging of the body, but some of the Aramaic texts probably mentioned that element too, as it is found both in JA1 and Heb1. The description of Yeshu the wicked in Ar1 as one who 'rebelled against the great God of Heaven', which echoes what we heard about him at the very beginning of our narrative (see above, 1.1) is omitted in JA1, but is expanded in Heb1, which recapitulates everything that was done to Yeshu because he 'rebelled against the God of Heaven', and also adds that he will have no share in the world to come.

The text's emphasis on the fact that so many witnesses saw what was done to Yeshu certainly should be read as the author's attempt to authenticate his narrative, against the many stories about Yeshu that were told by his followers and worshippers, which differed greatly from what is found in our text. The claim that these stories were based on eye-witness accounts runs through much of ancient Christian literature, from Luke's 'those who were eye-witnesses from the beginning' (Luke 1.2; οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται); John's insistence that 'He who saw it testified, and his testimony is true' (ὁ ἑώρακὼς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία; John 19.35); and to the many apocryphal gospels that purport to tell what their postulated authors saw with their own eyes. It also runs through the anti-Christian polemical literature of late antiquity, as when the Jew quoted by Celsus asks 'What trustworthy witness' (Τίς... ἀξιόχρεως μάρτυς) saw the dove that appeared when Jesus was baptised in the Jordan, or heard the voice which identified him as the son of God.³⁸

However, the lists of witnesses appended to our text should be read not only as a polemical statement, but as a literary device as well. Ending *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* with a list of witnesses gives the entire narrative the air of a more official legal document. Such lists of witnesses, who signed the legal document at the bottom or on the verso, were extremely common on private legal documents in antiquity and late antiquity, including business

³⁸ See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.41 and 1.48, as quoted above, in our comments on 7.1. And cf. 3.23, where Origen insists that unlike the 'pagan' myths, the stories about Jesus were written down by those who saw these events (ἀναγραφέντα ὑπὸ τῶν τεθεαμένων).

contracts and marriage documents. Such signatures do not appear in Roman court proceedings, presided over by a single judge and needing no testimony of witnesses of his conduct, but copies of such protocols do carry statements that vouchsafe for their own authenticity, such as ἀνέγνω, ‘read’, or ὑπογραφή, which literally mean ‘written below’.³⁹ The list of witnesses in our text may serve a similar function, but it must be noted that in the Christian *Acta martyrum* texts, which are based upon, or try to emulate, official Roman court proceedings, such concluding formulae are also absent.

9.4. Concluding Passages: Further Curses and Blessings

Textual Witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb3, Heb5

Ar1	“Thus may all your enemies, Lord, perish” etc. ⁴⁰	כן יאבדו כל אויביך יי' וג'.
JA1	“Thus may all God’s enemies perish, and the light of his friends shine [] like the shining of the light of the sun in its strength.”	כדאך יהלכו כל אעדא אללה וישרק נור מחביה [כ] אשראק נור אלשמס בקוטה.
Heb1	Peace and a blessing from the Lord will come upon those who fulfilled (the commandment) “And you shall uproot evil from	ושלום וברכה יחולו מיו"י על אלו שקיימו ובערת הרע מקרבך וכל העם ישמעו וג' וברכה ושלום וחיים וישועה מגלתם ⁴¹ צותתם ⁴² ונחמה על כל

³⁹ See Coles (1966, 52–54).

⁴⁰ Judg. 5.31.

⁴¹ Lege: מגלותם.

⁴² Lege: וצרתם?

your midst,”⁴³ “and the whole people will hear,” etc.⁴⁴ And for the whole of Israel (there will be) a blessing and peace and life and salvation from their exile and from their trouble (?), and (there will be) a consolation, Amen, the Lord.

Heb3 [Blessed i]s the Lord who revealed His secret to his servants and to his prophets and his pious (believers). Amen
 [ברוך ה' וי' [א]שר גלה סודו לעבדיו ולנביאיו ולחסידיו אמן אמן סלה.⁴⁵

Heb5 Cursed are the stupid people in every place and at every time, and blessed is He who chooses the seed of Abraham our father and does not spurn their prayer, as it is said, “And even thus, when they were in the land of their enemies, I did not spurn them nor despise them, so as to destroy them completely (or) break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord, their God.”⁴⁶

ארורים עמא טפשא בכל מקום ובכל זמן וברוך הבוחר בזרעו שלאברהם אבינו שאינו מואס תפלתן שנ' ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתים ולא געלתים לכלותם להפר בריתי אתם כי אני יי' אלהיהם.

As in the previous passages, we see a great deal of variation between the textual witnesses. Ar1 and JA1 agree in citing Judg.

⁴³ Deut. 17.7.

⁴⁴ Deut. 17.13.

⁴⁵ The last three words were added by a different hand.

⁴⁶ Lev. 26.44.

5.31, which JA1 cites here in Judaeo–Arabic, but will cite it again in Hebrew in the next passage. Heb1 opts for other biblical verses and for some further blessings for the Jews; Heb3 offers both a blessing and a curse; and Heb5 has other curses and blessings, and offers a different biblical verse. Apart from the citation of Judg. 5.31, all these elements probably were not there in the Aramaic copies of our text, and were added over the years into the different Hebrew versions.

The citation of Judg. 5.31 joins the curses of 9.4, and adds an element of blessing for those who ‘love God’ (or those who are ‘friends of God’), whose light will shine like the light of the sun.

9.5. Concluding Passages: A Colophon

Textual witnesses: Ar1, JA1, Heb1, Heb5 (this passage is omitted in Heb3)

Ar1	Here ends The Story of Yeshu the Na[zarene?].	חסלת מעשה יישו הנוֹן צרי? ⁴⁷
JA1	Here ends The Sentencing of Yeshu the Heretic. “Thus may all your enemies, Lord, perish” etc. ⁴⁸ “Happy are you, Israel; who is like you—a people saved by the Lord.” ⁴⁹	תם גזר דין ישו אלמארק בן יובדו כל אויבך י"י אשריך ישראל מי כמוך עֹם נושע בי"י.
Heb1	I have completed this book about the Tale of Yeshu the Nazarene on Tuesday, fifteen days in the month of Tammuz,	ונשלמתי זה ספר במשל יישו הנצרי ביום שלישי בחדש תמוז ימים חמשה עשר הרצ"ו שנים לבריאת העולם אני ישראל בן כ"ר יקותיאל זצ"ל.

⁴⁷ The reading of the last word is uncertain.

⁴⁸ Judg. 5.31.

⁴⁹ Deut. 33.29.

year 5,296 from the creation of
the world, I, Israel son of the
honourable Rabbi Yequiel,
may his memory be for a
blessing.

Heb5 Here ends the Story of Yeshu נשלם מעשה ישו הנצרי ומה אירע לו.
the Nazarene, and What
Happened to Him.

As in the previous passages, the textual witnesses diverge. Ar1 and Heb5 agree in calling the text ‘the Story of Yeshu’, but the fact that this title is given in Hebrew, even in the Aramaic text, may argue for its secondary nature. JA1 provides a Hebrew title that is very close to the Aramaic גזר דינא דישו, which probably was the work’s original title (see our comments on 1.1). JA1 also adduces partial Hebrew citations of Judg. 5.31 (which was cited by it in Judaeo–Arabic, and by Ar1 in Hebrew, in the previous passage) and of Deut. 33.29, which extols the Jews who are saved by the Lord and who will trample over their enemies. In Heb1 we find the copyist of the text—which is here called ‘the Tale (or, the Parable) of Yeshu the Nazarene’ (as in 0.1)—identifying himself as Israel son of Yequiel, and stating that he copied the text in 5296 AM = 1536 CE. In the earliest Aramaic texts, this passage probably was very short, and merely said ‘Here ends’, plus the title of the work.

EPILOGUE

We have now reached the end of our text, but not the end of our research. For, as noted throughout the present study, our knowledge of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* is limited by the textual witnesses at our disposal, which are mostly fragmentary, and which display numerous signs of the revision and alteration of specific passages of our text, both in its original Aramaic version and in its Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew versions. And yet, the fact that so many fragments of this text did reach us leaves much room for hope that more textual witnesses will be found in the future. Note, for example, the statement that, “In the Harkavy manuscript collection in the Library in Leningrad of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment Among Jews, we found more than ten fragments of various Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu*.”¹ At present, I am aware of only two relevant fragments in Harkavy’s collection (Harkavy-A and Harkavy-B), and such statements leave room for some optimism regarding the possibility of finding more textual witnesses for our text. If and when this will occur, the availability of the present edition certainly should facilitate the study of the new textual evidence in light of the textual evidence that we already have. The same is true when it comes to indirect textual witnesses, for now that we have a rough idea of what *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* looked like it should be

¹ See Zinberg (1972–1978, VII:170, n. 70). This statement was first quoted by Schlichting (1982, 4–5, n. 13).

easier to identify citations from and allusions to this text by ancient and medieval authors, and to distinguish more accurately between allusions to this text and allusions to texts that are a part of the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*.

Another task that awaits future scholars, which was not dealt with in the present volume, is the elucidation of the textual relations between *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and the 'Helena' recension of *Toledot Yeshu*. There is no doubt in my mind that whoever wrote the narrative of the life and death of Yeshu in which Queen Helena presides over his trial, made ample use of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, and combined narrative motifs, and even specific phrases, which he borrowed from our own text, with some rabbinic stories about Yeshu and some Christian stories about Jesus. But did he read our text in Aramaic, in Judaeo-Arabic, or in Hebrew? Also, which parts of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* did he adopt, omit, and/or modify; and what do these decisions tell us about his own interests and his own sensitivities? Such questions could hardly be asked as long as there was much confusion in scholars' minds between the 'Pilate' and the 'Helena' recensions of *Toledot Yeshu*, but now that we have a clearer sense of what the former text looked like, and how different it was from the latter, we can start assessing the relations between them with much greater precision. Such an analysis might also shed some light on the intriguing question of why the 'Helena' recension became so popular that it eventually superseded *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and drove it out of circulation.

While there is always the hope of new textual discoveries, and room for further intertextual analyses, we must never forget

that the reconstruction of ancient texts is not only an important goal in its own right, it also is a step towards a more nuanced understanding of ancient history. Here I believe that much work remains to be carried out, for whereas I have tried to contextualise *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* within the broader context of late-antique Jewish society, and of the Jewish–Christian confrontation in late antiquity, I have no doubt that much more could be done on this front. I note, for example, the need for a more sustained comparison between the stories told about Yeshu in *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and those told about him in rabbinic literature, and especially in the Babylonian Talmud. Such a comparison would shed more light on the multifaceted image of Yeshu in late-antique Judaism, and on the varieties of ways by which Jews tried to cope with the emergence, growing visibility, and eventually with the dominance of Christianity. I also note the need for more detailed comparisons between *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* and other late-antique texts, be they the real or imagined protocols of the trials of criminals and martyrs, or the real or imagined biographies of ‘holy men’, ‘saints’, and ‘heretics’, such as Jesus, Apollonius of Tyana, or Mani. Such comparisons will shed more light on what the author(s) of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* may have imagined when they were making up their fanciful account of the trial and execution of Yeshu, and how their earliest readers and hearers may have reacted to this novel text, which seems to a modern reader quite nasty, but also quite ridiculous.

Finally, I would note that *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* should be re-read within the context of late-antique and medieval Jewish–Christian relations, a topic that is of great relevance in our own

world as well. For, as I noted at the Preface to this volume, editing nasty texts is not an easy task, but ignoring them and hoping that they would somehow be forgotten is no solution either. Instead, we must read them for what they are, namely, historical documents of past hatreds and warnings against those of the present.

APPENDIX 1:

THE PRESERVATION AND ATTESTATION

OF THE DIFFERENT PASSAGES OF

GZAR-DINA DE-YESHU IN THE

DIFFERENT MANUSCRIPTS

Explanation of the following synoptic table:

A blank cell means that this passage is unattested in this manuscript, but may have appeared in its missing parts

A + means that this passage is fully—or almost fully—preserved in this manuscript

An x means that this passage is at least partly preserved in this manuscript

A - means that this passage is missing, even though the manuscript itself is well-preserved at this point

IS = Ibn Shaprut

Pas- sage	Ar1	Ar2	Ar3	Ar4	Ar5	IS	JA1	JA2	JA3	Heb1	Heb2	Heb3	Heb4	Heb5
0.1										+	-	-		
0.2										+	-	-		
0.3										+	-	-		
0.4										+	-	-		
0.5										+	-	-		
0.6										+	-	-		
0.7										+	-	-		

Pas- sage	Ar1	Ar2	Ar3	Ar4	Ar5	IS	JA1	JA2	JA3	Heb1	Heb2	Heb3	Heb4	Heb5
0.8										+	-	-		
0.9										+	-	-		
0.10										+	-	-		
0.11										+	-	-		
0.12										+	-	-		
0.13										+	-	-		
0.14										+	-	-		
1.1							x			+	+	+	x	
1.2							+			+	+	+	x	
1.3							+			+	+	+	x	
2.1							+			+	+	+	x	
2.2							+			+	+	+	x	
2.3							+		x	+	+	x	x	
3.1							+		x	+	+	+	x	
3.2							-		x	+	+	+	?	
3.3							-		+	+	+	+	x	
3.4							-		+	+	+	+	+	
3.5							-		+	+	+	+	+	
3.6							+		x	+	+	+	x	
3.7							+		+	+	+	+	+	
3.8							+		x	+	+	+	+	
4.1			x				+			+	+	+	x	
4.2			x				x			+	+	+	x	
4.3			+				+			+	+	+	x	
4.4			+				-			+	+	+	-	
4.5			+				-			+	+	+	-	
4.6			+				-			+	+	+	-	
5.1			x				-			+	+	+	-	
5.2							-			+	+	+	-	
5.3							-			+	+	+	-	
5.4	x						+			?	?	?	x	

Pas- sage	Ar1	Ar2	Ar3	Ar4	Ar5	IS	JA1	JA2	JA3	Heb1	Heb2	Heb3	Heb4	Heb5
5.5	+						+			+	+	+	x	+
5.6	x						+			+	+	+	x	+
5.7	x						+			+	+	+	x	+
5.8	x				x		+			+	+	+		+
5.9	+		x		x		+	x		+	+	+		+
5.9a	-		-		-		-	-		-	-	-		+
6.1	+		+		x		+	+		+	+	+		+
6.2	+		x		+		+	+		+	+	+		+
6.3	+				x	+	+	+		+	+	+		+
6.4	+					+	+	x		-	+	+		+
6.5	x		x			+	+	+		+	+	+		+
6.6	x		+			+	+	x		+	+	+		+
6.7	+						+			+	+	+		+
6.8	+						+			+	+	+		+
6.9	+						+			-	-	-		-
6.10	+						+			+	+	+		+
6.11	+						+			+	+	+		+
6.12	+						+			+	+	+		+
6.13	x						+			+	+	+		+
6.14	+						+			+	+	+	+	+
7.1	+	+					+			+	+	+	+	+
7.2	+	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.3	x	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.4	x	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.5	+	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.6	+	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.7	+	+				+	+			-	-	-	+	-
7.8	+	+					+			+	+	+	+	+
8.1	+	x		x			+	x		+	x	x	+	+
8.2	+	+		+			+	+		+	+	+	+	+
8.3	+	+		x			+	+		+	-	-	+	+

Pas- sage	Ar1	Ar2	Ar3	Ar4	Ar5	IS	JA1	JA2	JA3	Heb1	Heb2	Heb3	Heb4	Heb5
8.4	+	+		+			+	+		+	+	+	+	+
8.5	+	+		+			+	+		+	+	+	+	+
8.6	+	x		+			+	+		+	+	x	x	+
8.7	+		x	+			+	x		+	+	x		+
8.8	-		+	-			+			+		+		-
8.9	+		+	+			+			+		+		+
8.10	x		x	+			+			+		+		+
8.11	x			+			+			+		-		-
8.12	x		x	+			+			+		-		-
9.1	+		+	+			+			+		-		-
9.2	x		x	x			+			+		-		-
9.3	+						+			+		-		-
9.4	+						+			+		+		+
9.5	+						+			+		-		+

APPENDIX 2:

A TENTATIVE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF *GZAR-DINA DE-YESHU*

As noted throughout the present study, the general structure and the overall contents of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu* seem relatively stable across the many textual witnesses, in three different languages, but the specific wording of each passage often changes from one witness to the next. The following reconstruction therefore does not claim to be an accurate rendition of a hypothetical Urtext, nor does it claim to present the earliest recoverable text. Instead, it is intended to provide a general impression of what such a text may have looked like. Therefore, the reader should note:

- (a) For some of the passages no Aramaic textual witness is extant.
- (b) There are many differences between the Aramaic texts when they overlap, and the following text does not seek to reflect all these differences or to faithfully follow any single textual witness.
- (c) The text below does not include obvious interpolations into the text (the introductory interpolation 0, and the minor interpolation 5.9a), but probably includes passages and phrases that were not yet there in the earliest forms of *Gzar-dina de-Yeshu*, even though we have no direct textual evidence of these forms (and see, for example, our detailed comments on 5.4, 6.9, 6.14 and 7.8).

The reader should also remember that the division of the text into chapters and passages is my own, and so are the chapter headings, which were added by me in order to highlight the text's structure.

1.0. Setting the Stage

(1.1) The sentencing that was sentenced upon Yeshu son of Pandera, who denied (or, rebelled against) the God of Heaven and erred and misled the (Jewish) people (or, the world); who was from the town of Nazareth of the great Rome. (1.2) In the year four of King Tiberinus Caesar, there was a man named Pilatus the governor who was from the town of Rome, in the place called Thermae, in the district of Tiberias. (1.3) On the twenty-eighth of Elul, Pilatus the governor approached the market (or, street) of his town (i.e., Tiberias) and summoned Yehudah the gardener, and took him and brought him before Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah, and Marinus the great elder of the Jews, and a great crowd of people.

2.0. Pilatus and Yehudah the Gardener

(2.1) Pilatus the governor said to Yehudah the gardener: "We received word of a man called Yeshu. He is misleading the people with magic. Do you know him?" (2.2) He (Yehudah) said to him: "Yes, I know him." He (Pilatus) said to him: "Where is he from?" He (Yehudah) said to him: "From a town called Nazareth." And he (Pilatus) ordered him to bring the man. (2.3) Yehudah went with a crowd to bring Yeshu to the governor's court. They found him sitting with a great crowd around him including sick persons and cripples, whom he was claiming to heal. And Yeshu said to

them: “I am the son of God.” And Yehudah the gardener caught him and brought him to Pilatus the governor and to Marinus the elder.

3.0. Pilatus and Yeshu

(3.1) They said to Yeshu: “Where are you from and what is your profession?” He answered: “I am a Jew, but a *mamzer*.” (3.2) They said to him: “What is the name of your father?” He said to them: “His name is Pandera, and he is a Gentile.” (3.3) They said to him: “And what is the name of your mother?” He said to them: “Her name is Miriam.” They said to him: “And what is her profession?” He said to them: “She plaits women’s hair.” (3.4) They said: “Your mother’s husband—what is his name?” He said: “Pappos (or, Yoseph).” “And what is his profession?” He said: “A carpenter.” (3.5) They said to him: “And you—what is your name?” He said to them: “My name is Yeshu.” They said to him: “And what is your profession.” He said to them: “I am a fisherman.” (3.6) Then they placed in front of him the books of magic, and said to him: “These books—are they new or old?” He said to them: “They are old, and they are the ones that Balaam son of Beor had. I found them in the land of Egypt.” They asked him: “What benefit do you derive from them?” He said to them: “I cure the sick and heal the crippled.” (3.7) They said to him: “Why do you use magic and teach people teachings of evil?” Then they said to him: “Tell us in truth—where did you get these books?—or else we will kill you and not show you mercy, and we will throw your body to the wild beasts.” (3.8) He answered and said to them: “My masters, these books are not ancient and I did not find them in Egypt, and they are not by Balaam. In fact, they are

by Yoḥanan the Dyer who is my teacher, and I learned them from him.”

4.0. Pilatus and Yoḥanan

(4.1) Pilatus the governor said to Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and to Marinus the elder: “Do you know where Yoḥanan the Dyer is?” They said to him: “He is in Keph̄ar Naḥum, and if you wish we will send and summon Yoḥanan the Dyer and see what he says and pass judgment upon them (i.e., upon Yesu and Yoḥanan).” And Pilatus ordered to bring him over. (4.2) Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah looked for Yehudah Skariota and Shime‘on Kep̄ha and Binyamin Altigus, and sent them after Yoḥanan the Dyer. They went to the town Keph̄ar Naḥum, and Yehudah the gardener went with some men, and they found him (i.e., Yoḥanan) in prison, since Tiberinus Caesar imprisoned him, because he was misleading many people (or, many Jews) with magic. (4.3) They brought Yoḥanan the Dyer, and placed him in front of Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and Marinus the elder of the Jews and Pilatus and the crowd. (4.4) Yehoshu‘a answered and said to Yoḥanan: “These writings of magic that were found in the hands of Yesu, your disciple, where did he find them? If you tell us the truth, we will leave you, but if not, you and Yesu will be executed by a double-edged sword.” (4.5) Yoḥanan answered and said to them: “My masters! These writings—Yesu wrote them. I—Tiberinus Caesar had imprisoned me, and Yesu did not show them to me, but he and his eleven disciples wrote them, and are misleading people (with them).” (4.6) They answered and said to him: “The disciples of Yesu—what are their names?” He said to them: “Naqi and Matai and Luqa and Alqi

and Altigus and Yehudah, and Paulus and Petrus and Netzer and Buni and Todah.”

5.0. Yeshu’s Disciples

(5.1) They answered and said: “Who will go after them?” Yehudah Skariota and Shime’on Kepha and Binyamin Altigus said: “We will go and bring them.” (5.2) They went to Kephar Naḥum and looked for them. The disciples heard this, and escaped to Africa, and hid there under a certain tree. Yehudah and the others went after them, and found them under the tree. When they (the disciples) saw them they escaped from them, and Alqi and Paulus and Petrus and Yehudah (and Luqa and Altigus?) escaped (or, escaped to the town of Rome). (5.3) Yehudah and the others caught the remaining disciples and brought them before Rabbi Yehoshu’a and Marinus and Pilatus, and before a great crowd of people. (5.4) And they asked Yeshu and Yoḥanan: “Who are these five?”, and Yeshu said: “They are my disciples.” Yehoshu’a ben Peraḥiah said: “What are their names?” They (Yeshu and Yoḥanan) said: Naqi, and Matai, and Buni, and Netzer and Todah.” (5.5) Then Matai was brought to Rabbi Yehoshu’a ben Peraḥiah. He (Yehoshu’a) said to Matai: “Why is your name called Matai?” He said to him: “Because about me David said, ‘*Matai* (= When) will I come and be seen before God?’ (Ps. 42.3).” He said to him: “You fool! No! Thus said David about you, ‘*Matai* (= when) will he die and his name perish’ (Ps. 41.6)!” He decreed upon him, and they strangled him. (5.6) Then they brought Naqi. He (Yehoshu’a) said to him: “Why is your name called Naqi?” He said to him: “About me David said, ‘*Neqi* (= The one who has clean) hands, and a pure heart’ (Ps. 24.4).” He said to Naqi: “You

Fool! No, for the Bible said about you, ‘and He (God) shall *naqe* not *yenaqe* (= shall by no means absolve (the sin))’ (Exod. 34.7).” And it was ordered about him and they threw him into a fiery furnace. (5.7) Then they brought Buni. He (Yehoshu‘a) said to him: “Why are you called Buni?” He said to him: “Because about me the Bible says, ‘Israel is *beni* (= my son), the firstborn’ (Exod. 4.22).” Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah said to him: “You fool! Thus says the Bible about you, ‘Behold I will kill *binkha* (= your son), the firstborn’ (Exod. 4.23).” And it was ordered about him and they stoned him. (5.8) After him he (Yehoshu‘a) summoned Netzer. He said: “Why is your name called Netzer?” He said to him: “For about me the Bible says, ‘and a *netzer* (= sprout) will grow from its roots’ (Isa. 11.1).” He (Yehoshu‘a) said to him: “You fool! Thus the Bible said about you, ‘you were cast out of your tomb like a detested *netzer* (= sprout)’ (Isa. 14.19).” And it was decreed upon him, and his head was cut off. (5.9) After him they brought Todah. He (Yehoshu‘a) said to him: “Why is your name called Todah?” He said to him: “For about me David said, ‘A psalm for *todah* (= thanksgiving)’ (Ps. 100.1).” He said to him: “You fool! Thus said David about you, ‘He who sacrifices *todah* (= a thanksgiving offering) honours me’ (Ps. 50.23).” And it was decreed upon him, and they executed him.

6.0. Yeshu, Yoḥanan and Tiberinus Caesar

(6.1) After this Pilatus the governor said to Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “The five disciples of Yeshu the wicked, who misled (pl.) the people, have been executed; and Yoḥanan the Dyer—Yeshu’s teacher—and Yeshu, what execution do they deserve?

(or, they deserve to be executed).” (6.2) Rabbi Yehoshu‘a answered and said to Pilatus: “If our master wishes, we shall send and inform Tiberinus Caesar and whatever he shall tell us, we shall do.” They sent to him (i.e., to Tiberinus): “There are seven men here, who misled the whole world and such is their business”—everything they had been doing. (6.3) When King Tiberinus Caesar heard this, he sent to them: “Bring them to me!” And they brought them to him. Pilatus the governor and Marinus the great elder, and Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah and Rabbi Yehudah the gardener went with them to Tiberias, the great town. And they all went before Tiberinus Caesar. (6.4) When Yoḥanan the Dyer and Yesu came before him, Tiberinus Caesar said to them: “Who are you and what do you do?” (6.5) They answered and said to him: “We are the sons of the God of Heaven; and these books that are in our hands are books of healing.” He answered and said to them: “What healing is in them?” They said to him: “Every person who needs healing, we heal him, and if we wish to revive we revive and if we wish to kill we kill, and everything we want to do—we do. And if a barren woman who did not give birth is suffering, we can give her a child (even) without (intercourse with) a man. And also, whoever his soul is about to come out, and if he is about to die, we whisper in his ear—and he lives. And also, if we wish we make plants and grass grow and make rain fall down and do everything we want.” (6.6) When Tiberinus Caesar heard this, he said to them: “I do not want you to heal the sick, or revive the dead, or kill the living, or make rain fall, or make plants grow, but I have a daughter, who is a virgin—can you grant her children without intercourse with a man?” Yesu

answered and said: “Yes.” (6.7) So Tiberinus gave an order, and she was brought before them. And Yeshu whispered words of magic in her ear, and she became pregnant. Tiberinus Caesar said: “The foetus that is in her belly—is it male or female?” Yeshu said to him: “What the king wishes, I will make it, whether male or female.” (6.8) At that moment Caesar said to Pilatus the governor: “Let us arrest them for nine months, until we see whether she gives birth or not.” And Pilatus went and imprisoned them for nine months. (6.9) And there was great distress for Israel (i.e., for the Jews) for nine months. Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah went in secret and wrote writings and letters to all the towns where there were Jews, and said thus: “Decree a fast of three days, so that no man would taste food or drink, but will fast with a whole heart before the Holy One, blessed be He, so that Israel (i.e., the Jews) would not be destroyed, and the Torah and the laws and the commandments would not be annulled, for the deed of Yeshu the wicked is such and such.” And all the towns and places where there were Jews rose and decreed a fast of three days, and asked for mercy from the Master of Mercy. (6.10) And the Holy One, blessed be He, did for them (i.e., for the Jews) as he had done in every period and every time, and the foetus that was in the belly of Caesar’s daughter turned into a stone, and all the counsel of Yeshu the wicked was annulled. (6.11) And because the Holy One, blessed be He, turned that foetus into a stone, nine months had passed, and she did not give birth. Caesar sent and they brought Yeshu the wicked. He (Tiberinus) said to him: “Why did she not give birth?” He (Yeshu) said to him: “There are among the Jews those who bind the baby in its

mother's belly for twelve months." After twelve months he (Tiberinus) sent after him and brought Yeshu. He (Tiberinus) said to him: "Twelve months have passed, and why did she not give birth?" He (Yeshu) said to him: "Perhaps we are dealing with 'the matters of the world,' for she is a virgin, and the baby will not come out until she is penetrated. If you grant me permission, I will cut open her womb, and will extract it from its mother's belly alive, and my master, Caesar, will remember and know that (or, alive, and a male, and my master, Caesar, will know that) we are the sons of the God of Heaven, and we have the ability to do everything we want." Caesar said to him: "Go and do so." (6.12) Yeshu the wicked rose and tore up the womb of Caesar's daughter, and that foetus was discovered to be a stone in the belly of that virgin, and she immediately died. Caesar said to him: "Bring her back to life as you have claimed." He tried (to do so), but could not. (6.13) Caesar answered and said to Yehoshu'a ben Peraḥiah and to Marinus the great elder: "These men who misled the people and killed the king's daughter—what is the judgment due to them? You must execute them." They said: "King Caesar! At this time we cannot (execute people), but only the Holy One, blessed be He, and you can." (6.14) He said to them: "These men are Jews, and they are from your people, and they are dealing with magic, judge them (according to) the judgment of Torah, and if not—we will uproot you from the world."

7.0. Executing Yoḥanan and Yeshu

(7.1) At that time they burdened them with iron chains and led them to Tiberias. They set up a tree (or, a cross) for Yoḥanan, and crucified him on the fifth hour of the day; after this they

buried him. (7.2) After him they brought Yeshu, and were about to crucify him. But when he saw the cross set up to crucify him, he said words of (or, did acts of) magic, and flew out of their hands, and flew in the air of the heaven like a bird. (7.3) Yehudah the gardener said to Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah: “What should I do? Should I go after him?” Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah answered and said to him: “Go after him, and do not tarry.” (7.4) At that moment he (Yehudah) purified himself and was cleansed, and said the word of the Ineffable Name, and flew up after him (i.e., Yeshu). (7.5) When Yeshu the wicked saw him, he went and hid himself in the cave of Elijah, and he said words of magic and shut the mouth of the cave. (7.6) Yehudah the gardener came and said: “Opening, opening, open up! For I am the messenger of the Great God” (or, and said the word of the Ineffable Name), and the mouth of the cave opened up. (7.7) Yeshu the wicked disguised himself as a rooster (or, as a bird), until (or, and went and sat on the Carmel mountain, until) Rabbi Yehudah the gardener came and held him with his cloak, and brought him before Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah. (7.8) And they raised Yeshu the wicked up, and crucified him on a cabbage stalk (or, perhaps, in a cabbage garden).

8.0. The Fate of Yeshu’s Body

(8.1) And from before they raised him to the cross, he knew what is written in the Torah, “Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the cross” (Deut. 21.23). At that moment he sent and called the people whom he had misled and said to them: “If you come tomorrow and do not find me, nor my body, on the cross—you will know that I ascended to the firmament of Heaven (or,

Heaven, and you will not see me).” (8.2) And they crucified him alive, and they stoned him with a stone (or, with stones), and he died on the cross; and they did not want to take him down from the cross. (8.3) Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah said to them: “Because of Yeshu the wicked we shall change the law of the Torah? For it is written, ‘Do not let his corpse remain overnight on the cross’ (Deut. 21.23).” (or, “... ‘... overnight on the cross.’” And Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah said to them: “Bring him down from the cross”). (8.4) They brought him down from the cross and buried him in the water-channel in the garden of Rabbi Yehudah the gardener. (8.5) When these people whom he had misled came, and did not find him on the cross, they said (or, they surrounded and caught the Jews and said to them): “Yeshu our master told us the truth, that the Jews are dealing with a lie. If you crucified him on the cross, where is his body? In truth, he went to Heaven.” (8.6) Immediately Pilatus summoned Yehudah the gardener, and said to him: “The body of Yeshu—what did you (sg.) do with it?” (or, “The man whom you (pl.) have crucified—what did you (sg.) do with his body?”). (8.7) Rabbi Yehudah answered and said to him (i.e., Pilatus): “My master! Yeshu the wicked knew what is written in the Torah, ‘Do not let his corpse’ etc. (Deut. 21.23), and he misled these people, and said to them, ‘If you come tomorrow and do not find me on the cross, you will know that I ascended to Heaven.’ And now, if our master wishes, I will bring him, and will show his body to them, and they will believe and know that it is Yeshu the wicked.” (8.8) He (Pilatus) said to him: “Go and bring him out.” (8.9) Rabbi Yehudah the gardener went and brought him (i.e., Yeshu) up from his tomb,

and he threw a rope on his leg and dragged him in all the streets of Tiberias, and proclaimed upon him: “This is Yeshu, son of Pandera, the wicked, who rebelled against the God of Heaven, besides whom there is none.” (8.10) And he (Yehudah) brought him (i.e., Yeshu) before Pilatus (or, before King Tiberinus), and he summoned all the people whom he (Yeshu) had misled, and there were those who believed (that it is the body of Yeshu), and those who did not believe. (8.11) Pilatus the governor (or, King Tiberinus) answered and said to Yehudah the gardener: “This wicked person whom you buried in the water-trough—go and bury him in the place where they bury the dead.” (8.12) And Yehudah the gardener went and buried him (i.e., Yeshu) in the water-holes (?).

9.0. Concluding Passages

(9.1) The day on which Yeshu the wicked, the Nazarene, was crucified was the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan; and when they returned and brought him out of his tomb and dragged him in the streets of Tiberias—it was the twenty-first of the month of Nisan. (9.2) He who brought a great judgment upon Yeshu the wicked (or, upon Yeshu the wicked and upon his disciples)—He will quickly bring a judgment and retribution on the enemies of His people, and on whoever abandons the worship of the God of Heaven and worships and swears by (or, bows to) the name of Yeshu and on whoever says that he ascended to Heaven. And the God of Heaven will work a miracle for the Jews quickly and within a short time. (9.3) King Tiberinus Caesar, and Pilatus the governor, and Rabbi Yehoshu‘a ben Peraḥiah, and Marinus the great elder of the Jews, and Rabbi Yehudah the gardener, and crowds of the sons of [Tiberias?]-they bear witness that they

brought and crucified and killed (or, and killed and dragged through the streets of Tiberias) Yeshu the wicked, who rebelled against the great God of Heaven. (9.4) “Thus may all God’s enemies perish, and the light of his friends shine like the shining of the light of the sun in its strength” (Judg. 5.31). (9.5) Here ends The Sentencing of Yeshu the Nazarene.

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About the Team

Alessandra Tosi and Geoffrey Khan were the managing editors for this book and provided quality control.

Tamar Karni performed the copyediting of the book in Word. The fonts used in this volume are Charis, SBL Hebrew, SBL Greek, Estrangelo Edessa and Scheherazade New.

Anne Burberry created the index of the book.

Annie Hine created all of the editions—paperback, hardback, and PDF.

Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal designed the cover of this book. The cover was produced in InDesign using Fontin and Calibri fonts.

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Gideon Bohak

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